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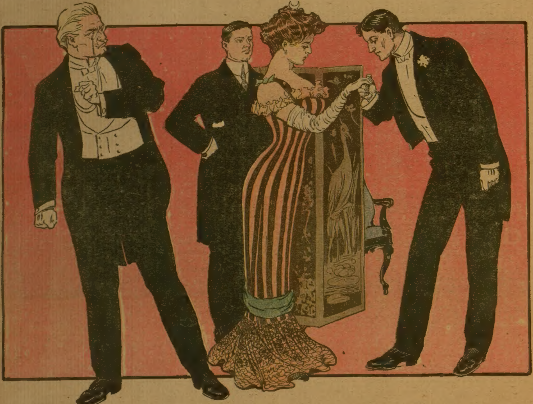

The Strange Pemberton Affair

By Archibald J. Paxton

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CHAPTER I.

"BR-R-R-R!"

Gideon Black, the well-known investigator of crime, dropped his feet from their elevated position on top of the desk in his private office, as the noisy telephone bell broke in upon his reflections, and shifting a cigar to the corner of his mouth, took up the receiver with a bored air, as of a man who resents a call to duty at ten p. m., after a particularly wearisome day.

"Hello!" he called, shortly.

"Hello! Hello! is this Mr. Black's office?" came in a disturbed voice.

"It is," replied the gentleman, bluntly; for he made it a point never to give information gratuitously.

"I would like to talk with Gideon Black," pursued the individual at the other end of the wire.

"Well, you are doing so," remarked the detective.

"Oh! is that you, Mr. Black? I'm very glad I found you home. Tried to get you half an hour ago, and they said you were out."

"Who is this speaking, please?"

"Pemberton—Judge Gordon Pemberton. Possibly you may remember meeting me not long since at the home of our mutual friend, Ackerman, with whom I believe you had a little professional business. He told me that if I ever found the need of a gentleman in your line to call upon you," continued the voice, which Gideon realized was still far from being steady.

From this he readily understood that something quite out of the common must have arisen to disturb the ordinarily calm and sedate millionaire, whom he recollected as a man of commanding presence, with his erect figure, a little inclined to portliness, white hair, military mustache and goatee—a personality of marked note in New York society.

"Certainly I remember, judge, and often recall our warm little argument on the subject of second sight. Now, what can I do for you?" he said.

"I dislike to ask you to call upon me at this hour of the night, Black, and such a beastly night in the bargain; but it would oblige me very much if you could conveniently do so. I am in a peck of trouble, and need both counsel and such assistance as only you can render me," remarked the man of wealth, at the other end of the wire.

"Sorry to hear that, judge. I've had an exhausting day, but if you think it imperative that you see me now I am at your service. What is your number, please?"

"Seventy-three. To tell you the truth, Black, I don't remember ever being in such a nervous condition before in all my life. It has upset me completely, and I shall not sleep a wink all night unless I have some one to confide in, and who may possibly see a little light in this darkness. Please come."

Gideon Black knew from the signs that it must be a matter of extraordinary importance to disturb this man of iron will, who had a reputation for coolness and sang froid second to none.

"I will do so immediately. My man is bringing me a cup of coffee, and in a very few minutes I can be on the way. If I seem late do not feel anxious, for there is rolling in from the sea one of the neatest fogs I ever saw, and it may delay progress on all transportation lines. Might I inquire as to the nature of your trouble, judge—just a hint to steer me in my ruminations while en route?" the detective went on.

"It concerns the mysterious disappearance of a packet of rubies from my private safe in the library. You may have heard that I am rather fond of jewels—indeed, it is well known that the collection of such has become a fad with me in my later years. Now, it is not so much the pecuniary value of these gems that disturbs me, though they would probably bring a quarter of a million in the open market, as the mystery attaching to their vanishing. You can understand without my saying more over the wire, Black. When you come you shall know all. I can look for you when?"

"Any time within the hour. I give you my word I will join you, judge."

"That is sufficient for me. Thank you, my dear fellow. Good-by."

Then Gideon heard him ring off.

His sedate man, James, entered at that moment, bearing a steaming cup of coffee and a couple of rolls.

"Get me a dry coat, James. I must go out again tonight," remarked the detective.

As he sat there sipping the hot coffee, which sent a glow through his frame, Gideon Black considered the matter that was about to engage his especial attention.

Thus far it did not present any especially new features, unless he might consider the robbery of a gem collector along that line; for he had, during his experience of years, known numerous cases where some member of a wealthy household proved to be light-fingered, and scandal was only averted by rare diplomacy.

Nevertheless the fact that this remarkable man of millions should figure prominently in such a mystery gave the affair an unusual interest in the eyes of the solver of puzzles.

"Perhaps it may turn out to be something novel and out of the common. At any rate the setting is original, since one could hardly select a more distinguished house than that of Judge Pemberton for a mystery to have its lodgment. But it would have been nicer had he only waited until morning for this interview."

Five minutes later Gideon Black passed out of his house, wrapped comfortably in an ulster; for the November fog was as he had said, most dense and raw, so that one felt the need of additional clothing in braving its chill.

Just as he had suspected the elevated trains were running at a reduced speed; and although it took him out of his way considerably Black walked over to the subway, to be whisked off uptown.

After alighting at his station he knew there was a lonely walk ahead, with a possibility of actually becoming lost in the streets of New York—something he had never experienced save during the famous blizzard that cost so many people their lives; but which was not at all out of the question this night.

The fog was worse than any London one Black had ever seen—it had swooped down upon the city after dark, and continued to grow more and more dense until in color and consistency it resembled pea soup as well as anything he could recall.

Why, it was utterly impossible to see the houses within ten feet, and wishing to find out the time he had to actually climb halfway up a corner lamp-post.

Twice he was hailed by cabbies whose vehicles crept slowly and cautiously along, and asked what the name of the street might be; and when these nighthawks of metropolitan cabdom lose their bearings the case must be the worst on record.

Very few people were abroad, and those who had to go forth were creeping along in a manner that suggested sleep-walkers, their hands outstretched in a groping way, and all their senses on the alert lest they lose their bearings.

Gideon Black laughed to himself at the comical nature of the thing.

"Really, this does beat anything I ever saw in all my life. It's deuced lucky it happens only once in a decade, for such a catastrophe would paralyze commerce. I guess I'd better take a look at some of those numbers. I don't want to overshoot the mark," saying which he climbed the steps of the nearest mansion, and tried to make out the figures on the transom over the doors.

"Sixty-three, eh? That's getting pretty close to the firing line. Five more houses should do the trick. At any rate they're all gilt-edged around this section, and I suppose the judge owns as dandy a residence as the next one. They say he must be worth ten million if a cent. And yet trouble does not spare him. It's the way of the world. Let's see, this must be the fifth house, and it is a mighty fine pile, too. Somebody coming down the steps. Hello! what does this mean?"

Gideon Black had been muttering to himself as a man will sometimes do when his thoughts are flying; but his last sentence was caused by the discovery that the man creeping down the steps of the millionaire's mansion seemed to be roughly dressed, with a cap upon his bullet-shaped head that gave him a peculiarly sinister aspect.

Perhaps Gideon might have believed the party, like himself, had been up there examining the number so as to get his bearings in the awful fog, had it not been his luck to catch a glimpse of the fellow's face when he reached the pavement and stood for a moment under the dim light of the street lamp.

He immediately stepped forward and clapped a hand on the other's arm.

"What business have you up there, my man?" he demanded.

The other had not recognized him as yet, since the big collar of his coat was turned up around his cheeks, and he began to whine dismally:

"Mister, I don't know where I am, an' that's a fact. Twisted up in me bearin's the wust ever. I never seen the like. Got a cousin cookin' at one uv these swell houses along here—think it's ninety-nine, but I knows the looks uv the door, an' I was just takin' a squint to get wise. That's a straight spiel, mister. Seems as if the end of the world was a comin' like. I'll go on an' find the joint now."

"Well, it looks a bit suspicious to see Paddy the Pig creeping down the steps of Judge Pemberton's mansion on a night like this. Mind your eye, Paddy, for you remember I warned you I'd get you with the goods the next time you made a break," said the detective, turning down the collar of his ulster, and dropping his hand from the fellow's arm.

The heavy-set prowler gave an exclamation of alarm, as his piercing eyes took in the physiognomy of the man before him.

"Gideon Black!" he exclaimed, adding something pretty strong to indicate how much astonished he was to discover the identity of his companion; "yuh needn't think I'm doin' anythin' slick up this way, Black. It's just as I was tellin' yuh. I have a cousin on this street. She promised to lend me a bunch of bones tonight, an' I'm after the spuds all right."

"Perhaps so, but I'm just telling you that it looks queer to see you creeping down the steps of this particular house. I'll remember it, Paddy, and perhaps you may have to give me a little interview later. Now, go on!" sternly.

The fellow gave him one startled look, then wheeled and slunk away, vanishing almost immediately in the pea-soup fog as if he had been swallowed up by the opening of the ground.

Black waited a minute until it seemed as though the notorious second-story man must have reached a point where it would not be possible for him to see that the detective ascended the very steps he had used, and then he rang the bell.

Some one must have been on the alert for just this summons within, since almost immediately the door swung open and Gideon Black saw a middle-aged man in livery standing before him.

"I have called at the request of Judge Pemberton. My name is Black," he said shortly, and the man, who was evidently a butler, bowed.

"You are expected, sir. Be pleased to enter and follow me," the other observed.

And it was thus that Gideon Black for the first time stood within the grand hall of the magnificent Pemberton mansion, of which so much had been said.

CHAPTER II.

The butler took him straight back to the library, and as he opened the door to usher the visitor in Black saw a tall gentleman with a white head of hair jump from an easy-chair that was upholstered in leather.

Another moment and he was shaking hands with the distinguished owner of the mansion.

One keen glance assured Black that the judge was indeed laboring under considerable excitement, for his hair was disturbed and there was a flush upon his patrician face that bordered on fever.

"Glad to see you, Black. Kindly close the door, Obed, when you retire. Come over here and take a seat where you'll be comfortable. It was very nice of you to favor me in this way, for I've since seen that it is a very disagreeable night to be moving about. But this was an absolute case of necessity, Black. A man of my age can't afford to allow himself to get worked up into a state of nervousness that may bring about a stroke of apoplexy. I was going wild trying to wrestle with the infernal puzzle by myself, and felt that I just had to have assistance if I wished to retain my sanity."

"Is it so bad as that, judge?" asked the detective, sinking back in a commodious chair with a sigh of satisfaction.

"It certainly is. I've had many things happen during the course of my eventful life, but never until now felt that the honor of my house was threatened. It's a terrible thing, Black, to suspect that you may be harboring a serpent, taken in and warmed in your bosom, only to strike you in your old age."

Evidently the judge had definite suspicions as to the source of his trouble, but Gideon Black would never allow himself to enter a case prejudiced one way or the other, and he could hear all that was said without committing himself to a definite conclusion until he had proved his theory.

"Tell me about those rubies you have lost—what did they consist of, why were you collecting them, was it your habit to keep them in your house, when did you last see them, and everything else pertaining to the same."

"It is very simple so far as that goes. I am a collector of gems, particularly rubies, diamonds and opals. In my box down at the trust company of which I am president, I suppose I have a cool million dollars' worth of the gems in a number of little packets; and occasionally I overhaul them, perhaps to add some new purchase; for it seems that I cannot resist buying an especially fine specimen when it is offered. In fact, some dealers know my weakness and tempt me continually. But that is not to the point. I brought that package home yesterday afternoon for the purpose of letting my wife see the little beauties, for she had never set eyes on them before."

The judge stopped for a moment, and at the mention of his wife a strange look passed over his face that seemed to Black to signify both adoration and pain, for he drew a long breath very like a sigh.

Gideon remembered seeing the young wife of the millionaire several times, and could not forget the fact that she was a beauty—it was true that the judge was about sixty-five and she was not much over thirty; but he was such a splendid-looking man, of whom any woman would be proud, and showed no sign of age, that somehow the match did not seem at all out of place.

He had apparently aged five years since Gideon saw him last, and that was only a few months back.

"Pardon me, judge, but was that the only reason you had for fetching the rubies home from your safe deposit vault?" he asked, seeing that the other was falling into a state of pensive retrospection, and needed questioning in order to bring out the dominant facts connected with the case.

"No, as I was about to tell you, she had expressed a great desire for a bracelet, and I immediately suggested having one made from some of the finest rubies in my collection. Nothing would be too good for my wife, Mr. Black. So I carried the packet home in my limousine car and stowed it away in yonder safe, where in times past I have kept many a little fortune over night without ever losing a dollar. The rubies were taken from that repository, Black, some time between last night at eleven and this evening at nine."

"Let me understand you plainly, judge. You mean you placed the packet yourself in the safe last night at eleven o'clock?"

"I did, sir."

"And you have not seen the gems since?"

"I can swear to it, Black, that I have not set my eyes once on the packet of rubies since the hour I placed them securely in the safe and closed the same, testing it to make sure it was fast," he said, slowly, but with emphasis.

"I am glad you added that last, for it shows that you were very particular as to the fact of the safe being locked. Was that your habit, or an unusual circumstance with you, sir, may I ask?"

"I was always very methodical, but confess that there have been several occasions during twenty years, when I found I had forgotten to fasten the safe over night. It happened when there was little of very great value inside, to be stolen, and nothing ever happened. But last night I was more than usually careful for several reasons."

"I should like to hear them, judge."

"Well, as I told you, I am a connoisseur on rubies, and this collection was in some respects unique, and could not easily be duplicated. Hence, you can well understand that I valued them highly. Then again my wife had shown so much delight over the collection, and seemed to love to handle the deeply-colored stones, letting them run through her white fingers as a pleased child would, that they immediately assumed an additional value in my eyes. You understand, Black, how a man will make a fool of himself when love pleads admission to the heart?"

"It does you credit, judge. Your wife is certainly a beautiful and a charming woman, and you could hardly do too much to please her. Now, is that the sum total of your reasons, judge?"

The handsome-looking gentleman seemed to writhe a little uncomfortably in his chair as the detective thus spoke of his spouse, but arousing himself he threw off the feeling that was overpowering him, and looked alert.

"It was not. Lately there have been several burglaries in this immediate neighborhood, and they have disturbed me considerably, especially after I brought my priceless collection of rubies away from the bank. I would not have lost them for four times their intrinsic value. It was with that thought in my mind that I was so exceedingly careful to make sure the little safe yonder was locked after I had placed the packet away in a compartment."

"Allow me to examine the safe, please," said Gideon, rising.

"Certainly, and I would be the happiest man on the face of the earth if you were only wizard enough, Black, to draw that fatal packet out from some secret hiding place inside the little steel receptacle," declared the judge, following the other across the floor.

A minute sufficed to show Gideon all he wished to know about the repository where the rich man kept such valuables as he chanced to have in the house over night.

It was an ordinary safe, as well made as any of its size, but offering no very stupendous difficulties to a regular cracksman, provided he were given a little time to work upon it in the usual way.

But so far as he could see it had not been damaged in the least—whoever took the packet of rubies must have possessed the secret of the combination, and was therefore able to command the safe to open at the magic word of "sesame."

That always signified an "inside job."

Once more they resumed their seats, and the detective took up his line of cross-questioning.

"Do you remember having opened the safe at any time during the day?" he went on.

"I did not. After dinner tonight, while my wife was out with my nephew at the opera, which I did not care to attend, having a slight attack of rheumatism—I confess to you, Black, that I told her it was a simple cold, for I do not like her to know that I am at last beginning to feel the coming of age—I say that about nine o'clock the notion struck me to take a look at the rubies, for I was all alone, and my thoughts had been not of an altogether agreeable character."

"So at nine o'clock you opened the safe for the first time since the hour that night when you deposited the packet there?" asked Gideon, with emphasis.

"For the first time, Black. I had no occasion during the day to get anything from the safe, and indeed, there was something happened during the afternoon that for the time being dwarfed all other events into insignificance; and there was awhile when it seemed a matter of indifference to me whether I ever saw the rubies or any of my other collections again. I shall tell you about that presently, for I deem it absolutely necessary that you know everything touching upon my private affairs that could by any possibility have a bearing upon this lamentable mystery."

"I commend your frankness, judge, and depend upon it that whatever you may confide to me never goes one step further. It shall ever remain a dead secret. When you opened the safe and looked for the packet it was gone, I take it?"

"Yes, sir, it had utterly disappeared. I hunted through the safe a dozen times in the hope that I had simply misplaced it, but without avail."

"Nothing else missing?"

"I could see nothing, Black. There was in one drawer quite a roll of money as you saw when you looked just now—all of a thousand dollars I should imagine. If a thief had opened the safe he would never have left that, do you think?" the judge asked, eagerly.

Gideon Black shook his head in the negative.

"Such a thing would be without precedent, judge, unless it happened that the fellow was frightened away, and had only time to snatch the packet, but you do not think yourself a burglar took the rubies?"

"I do not know. I am in as great a fog as you were in coming here, Black. One minute I think it might be a burglar, for I found evidences that seemed to point to the fact that some one had pried open that window over there recently—in fact, Obed reported the incident to me this morning, but I had seen that the safe appeared to be untouched, and something put it out of my mind before I could think of opening it to make sure. Then again I realize that the person who looted this safe must have known the combination, and that brings me back again to my woe."

"Then there is another besides yourself in the secret of the combination?"

"Yes, two, my wife, and my nephew, Charles," replied the judge, cowering in his chair as he thus by implication accused one of the members of his household of having robbed him of his precious rubies, and Gideon Black felt more than passing compassion for the proud man as he saw the weary way in which he rubbed his white aristocratic hand across his forehead, now marked by new lines of care.

CHAPTER III.

"Would you mind telling me about your nephew, judge? I never met him, and perhaps it is only right that I should know something about the relations that exist between you," Gideon Black went on.

Of course there was a meaning in his words, and the other so understood it, for his hands opened and closed as if he were laboring under strong emotion, but in his legal practice the judge had learned to control himself admirably, and when he spoke there was only a touch of pathos in his voice.

"Charles is the boy of my only sister. I took him to my heart and home years ago, and he has been as dear as a son to me, enjoying the benefits of my wealth in foreign travel and everything heart could wish. It was always my intention to leave him my fortune, though of course after I married again, which as you may know was only a year and a half ago, I changed my will, dividing things between the two I loved. Here is a picture of Charles, taken recently."

Gideon Black was a pretty good judge of faces, though even he had at times been deceived, but he thought there was frankness and honesty in the features he now saw before him.

"It is a good face, judge. If I were to decide things by appearances alone I would stake much on the honor of that young man, but in my profession we learn to look deeper than outside indications. Show me what a man's thoughts are and I can tell what he is; but faces may deceive. I have known them to do so many times, with both men and women. Nevertheless, I like that picture. I don't wonder you love the original. I hope he is worthy of your affection. What do you know of his habits, judge?"

"He has been the average young fellow, not a saint, but at the same time possessed of a high sense of honor that endeared him to his friends. I do not believe he has ever been what you would call wild, and of late years seemed to have become unusually sobered. There was a reason for that, I have discovered."

"He is about how old—thirty?"

"Thirty-two."

"And has never married?"

The judge drew in a long breath.

"N—no," he replied, slowly.

"You must take me into your full confidence, judge, if you wish me to handle this very unfortunate matter in a way that will satisfy you. There is puzzle enough I imagine without my being kept in ignorance concerning vital points."

"What you say is true enough, Mr. Black. I hesitated because the answer in a measure touched upon the little matter which I meant to speak of presently, concerning my private affairs. But so far as I know Charles has never married."

"Pardon me for mentioning the subject, but would he have any reason for wishing to take those rubies? You supply him with plenty of cash I presume, sir?"

"An abundance. Indeed, it was only three nights ago that he begged me not to make my usual deposit of funds to his credit this month, as he has not begun to use up the last allowance; so you see it could not be that he was in any need. He has not seemed himself of late, though more than usually affectionate toward me."

"Why should he be, judge? Does this

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have a bearing also on the matter you hinted at? If so perhaps it would be the part of policy not to wait longer, but take me into your confidence now."

"I believe it does have a bearing, Mr. Black. But I am unable to say whether it is a disturbed conscience working in Charles, or simply his natural affection for me finding expression. But you shall judge for yourself. Have you heard about my marriage some eighteen months ago?"

"I simply saw a mention of it in the papers. Not knowing you at the time I naturally took little notice of it, save to understand that it was agreed your wife was the loveliest bride ever seen at St. Thomas' Church."

"Which was true, every word of it. Charles was away in Europe at the time, and sent his congratulations by cable. He only came back a month ago. I never dreamed that he had ever met Muriel before, nor did either of them tell me such a thing. Only this afternoon my wife confessed to me that she had known Charles three years ago over on the Riviera, and that they had been engaged to be married! Fancy my feelings, Black, knowing what a handsome dog Charles is, and so suitable in age for that divine woman, while I am sixty-five. It was a terrible shock, almost as bad as the discovery of the rifling of my safe, discovered later."

"I can well understand that it must have upset you considerably, judge, but why let it give you worry? Engagements are made and broken every day. Of course neither of them liked to confess the truth to you at first, and as days went on it became a secret that must have caused them both much anxiety, not knowing how you might look at the matter. Did they have a quarrel?"

"Yes, and separated in a fit of pique. Muriel says she never cared for Charles as she does for me, but I have eyes, Black, and I am not a fool now, if I was one when I thought youth and beauty could mate with age, and be contented. It is not in nature. If I had only known in time all might have gone well, for I should have done everything in my power to bring them together again. Now it is too late!"

The attitude of the man told of a proud spirit abased, and yet Gideon Black felt strongly drawn toward the judge, for he impressed him as one who would make tremendous sacrifices for those he loved, even to giving up the woman who had promised to be his wife, if he thought she might be happier with another.

"Is what you are saying quite fair toward the lady? Have you any reason to believe that she does not love you; or that she still cherishes the old affection for Charles?" he asked sternly.

"Perhaps it is hardly fair, Black. Especially when only this afternoon she told me, with her arms around my neck, that I was everything on earth to her; and that the affection she once entertained toward Charles had grown into the regard one feels toward a brother. Looking into her eyes I believed her; but it is since then that horrible doubts have arisen to torture me."

"And how about Charles—can you remember that on any occasion since his return he has conducted himself toward Mrs. Pemberton in a way other than might be expected from a nephew?"

"I do not know; I cannot exactly say. Just now I recall nothing of moment, and I do not wish to allow the demon of jealousy to disturb my reasoning powers one iota. No, so far as I can remember, Charles has been kind and obliging, and never exceeded the limit that would mark the affection a man might feel for the wife of his uncle. If he still entertains that other sort of feeling for the lady who was once his promised wife he is struggling manfully to overpower it, and that may be the cause of his unusual demonstrations of affection toward me recently. Muriel assured me she and Charles had had a full and complete understanding, and that he had advised her to confide in me, and also to say that he was planning to leave New York for a trip around the world that would take him away two years or more. Mr. Black, I felt the utmost confidence in their honesty of purpose, and showed it by confiding my wife to the care of Charles tonight at the opera. I was just recovering from that shock when this other one came and caught me with my defenses down. Two in one day proved more than I could wrestle with alone, and therefore I sent for you."

"Of course, judge, I must admit to you that this disclosure may put another construction upon this distressing incident. It would be folly to deny that it might possibly have a bearing upon the matter, and it is my duty to spare no means to arrive at the truth. When I ask questions it is to lay bare all the facts, and not because I suspect any particular party. Some one took those rubies from yon safe; you have employed me to discover who the guilty party may be, and I am going about the matter in my own way. You still wish me to continue, do you not?"

"More than ever, sir. What you say arouses new fears in my heart. There seems to be a dreadful suspicion back of your words which you evidently hesitate to put more plainly. I beg of you not to spare me in the effort to unearth the truth. If still another blow lies over my devoted head, it must fall soon enough, and the knowledge that it is coming will not unman me. I have even had such a suspicion myself, and immediately hated myself for entertaining it. It seemed to me that such a thought was unworthy of me, and did dishonor to the lady involved."

"Plainly speaking, then, judge, there must have been some powerful motive actuating the person who took the jewels—some sudden need of a very large sum of money. While we are upon this distressing subject let us sift it to the bottom and satisfy our minds one way or the other. Such things have happened before, and they will again."

"In other words, Mr. Black, you are hinting at my fears—that there is a possibility Charles may have proven a traitor to his honor, and made love to my wife during the month he has been home—that even now he is planning to steal from me her whose love I value beyond all my earthly treasures, and the proceeds of this robbery of my safe may be used to further their wicked flight. Is that it, sir?" he asked, his face stern, his hands clenched.

"I would not have mentioned such a possibility myself, but that you said it had come up before you. Sir, I do not believe it to be so; in fact after looking on that young man's face I could not think him guilty; but let us for the moment try and shut our eyes to that fact, and act as if it were a possibility. Under such conditions it would be in keeping with the other act of treachery to purloin your jewels as well as your wife. What we have to set up against this hideous nightmare is the apparent honesty expressed in that boy's face, and your belief in the pure affection of your wife. These are both good things in their way, but to a man of my calling they are not enough. I must have proof, and that can only be found in laying my hand upon the guilty party."

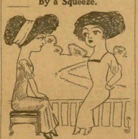
"And they are together now. She has undoubtedly told him of our scene of this afternoon—indeed, I understood it was to be so, and partly to show my full confidence in them both I purposely stayed at home from the opera tonight," admitted the stricken judge, softly.

"I wish you would shake hands with me, judge. It is seldom I have run across a thoroughbred gentleman of your big caliber. And, sir, depend upon it, I am more than ever bound to render you every assistance in my power to unravel this perplexing mystery, which, I still hope will in its solution bring you both peace of mind and renewed happiness in the love of your wife. If they were guilty and he had taken the jewels with the purpose of fleeing, surely you placed just the opportunity they would have sought in their hands. You were certainly putting them to the test, judge, and your own faith at the same time. But there are other things I wish to learn. Pardon me if I persist in hammering away at my questions again. There is one point you do not appear to have taken into consideration. You say your wife knows the combination of the safe—now, has it not occurred to you that perhaps she may have come in here at some time during the day, and opening the depository yonder during your absence in town, taken the rubies out?"

Judge Pemberton started as if shot, and stared at the detective with a new expression of anxiety upon his face; it was the look of one who has seen his worst fears brought to light, for evidently such a thought had come to him and in his splendid loyalty to this fair wife he would not let it lodge in his soul.

This story develops a strange mystery and very thrilling happenings, and will be continued in the Ledger issue of next week. If you are not a regular subscriber to the Ledger we would like to have your name on our list. The Ledger is only $1.00 per year; it is worth many times that amount. Send in your subscription, for many great stories that you cannot afford to miss will appear during the coming year.

By a Squeeze.



Philadelphia Girl (to Montana guest)—Is it true that a girl in your State was hugged to death by a grizzly bear?

"Not quite. The girl won in the first round."

A Hard Heart.

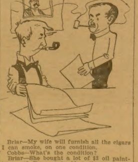
An itinerant preacher preached to a cowboy audience on the "Prodigal Son." He described the foolish prodigal's extravagance and dissipation; he described his penury and his husk eating with the swine in the sty he described his return, his father's loving welcome, the rejoicing, and the preparation of the fatted calf.

The preacher, in his discourse, noted a cowboy staring at him very hard. He thought he had made a convert, and, addressing the cowboy personally, he said from the pulpit:

"My dear friend, what would you have done if you had had a prodigal son returning home like that?"

"Me?" said the cowboy promptly and fiercely. "I'd have shot the boy and raised the calf."

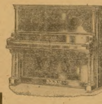
Oh, Lucky Man!



Briar—My wife will furnish all the cigars I can smoke, on one condition.

Cobbs—What's the condition?

Briar—She bought a lot of $3 oil paintings and I've got to blow the smoke at them to do the aging.



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The Withered Hand;

Or, The Story of a Terrible Inheritance

By HARPER W. THORNTON

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Begun in No. 40, Oct. 1. Subscriptions can begin with that issue, or back copies can be obtained from news stands, or our agents, or by mail from office of publication.

CHAPTER XIII.

MORE MYSTERY.

MR. JACK CLAWSON reached The Black Larches after his interview with Polly, the attorney, in time to see Habberton staggering down the stair. The sole heir was white and flustrated, and upon beholding his friend he executed a last step and landed before him.

"You have come, Jack?" he exclaimed. "Thank Heaven!"

"What has happened? You are white to the gills, Delos."

Habberton led the way into the library and dropped nerveless into a chair.

"I have encountered Kalmah, and a cooler devil never breathed."

"But you are living," remarked Jack with a smile. "At least he did not put you out of the way."

Thereupon Habberton related his interview with the Hindu and his subsequent finding of old Drusilla in the corridor overhead.

"So the old woman is alive," exclaimed Jack. "You left her in your room, you say?"

"Yes, on my bed."

"Then to her," was the response. "She may be able to give us some information, for she evidently had an adventure before you discovered her."

"With the Hindu, no doubt."

A search of Habberton's bedchamber failed to find Drusilla, and the two friends were nonplused.

Jack did not see fit to unburden himself to Habberton concerning his errand into the city, and the new heir was content to accept the dubious hints he allowed to escape.

"Why not a raid upon the hidden chamber?" proposed Habberton, and then he seemed inclined to take back his words.

"Not yet," said Jack. "Let a few hours pass. I should like to make the raid when the other miscreants are there. They may come back again tonight."

"So much the worse for the raiders," smiled Habberton, dolefully. "Kalmah would be easier alone than with his compatriots."

"I prefer the whole lot," was the answer.

"But Thaddora?"

"Always the girl," said Clawson. "I do not believe that she has become a priestess of the Withered Hand, whatever that may be."

"But Kalmah said so."

"The conscienceless liar!" exclaimed Jack. "I have no doubt that she is in the power of the band, but she would not become their priestess nor aid them in their black arts."

"You know the mesmeric powers of Kalmah."

Jack thought of what Mr. Polly had told him.

"Wait," he said. "We must wait."

"But hours are days to me with that viper in this house."

By and by Jack went out for a stroll, to think and plan, he said, and Habberton, with his nerves still unstrung, locked himself in the library.

He fell asleep and did not awaken till the shadows were long and the cool winds of evening stirred the branches of the larches.

Finding himself still alone he rose and unlocked the door, then he passed from the house and, crossing the veranda, lost himself among the shrubbery of the estate.

It was the first time he had bent his steps in a certain direction and he soon found himself moving down a gentle slope which terminated on the bank of a little run which not far away passed under a culvert and joined the waters of the bay.

All at once he stopped, for a figure occupied a stone near the water's edge, and Habberton, at a second glance, recognized Clawson.

"Out yet?" he exclaimed as he came up, his voice causing Jack to look around. "Seems to me you have a difficult problem to solve."

Jack threw up one hand in token of silence and Habberton drew nearer and sat down beside him.

"If you will look yonder, to the left," said Jack, "lifting your eyes a trifle you can see one of the windows on the mysterious west wing."

Habberton obeyed and noted the window.

"What is attractive about the window now?" he asked in a low whisper.

"Watch and see. Your eyes are keen, Delos?"

"I am proud of them."

"I've been watching that window ever since I left the house. I have done without my meals, for curiosity has driven the very thought of hunger from my head."

"I see nothing but the window," Habberton remarked after a long look.

"No?"

"It's a vacant window, nothing more."

The next moment the hand of Clawson fell upon Habberton's arm.

"What do you see now?"

"There's something in the window," was the reply.

"Something white, eh?"

"Yes."

"Well, that's the girl—Thaddora."

Habberton started and looked blankly at his companion.

"There's not the slightest doubt of it. She is dressed in white, but that is not all. If the light was a little stronger you would see a mark on her bosom."

"By Jove! I see it now," was the ejaculation.

"Yes? And it looks like—what?"

"It's the accursed Ace of Diamonds!"

"To be sure it is," grinned Jack. "She's got the sign all right, the same one that appears on the foreheads of those who die in your new inheritance."

"It is quite plain now, as if it had suddenly taken on a more livid hue."

"Just so."

The figure at the window seemed to possess a fascination for Habberton. He leaned forward in his eagerness and gazed in silence.

"How came you to see her first?" he asked at last.

"By the merest chance or good fortune, call it what you will," was the retort.

"And you've been watching Thaddora all day while I reposed in the library at any moment liable to fall a victim to Kalmah's devilishness?"

"I didn't forget you, Delos, only I didn't care to lose sight of the girl."

"She seems to be in the hidden chamber," Habberton said. "If she is there Kalmah is not far off."

To this Jack made no reply.

"Watch closely," he said a moment later. "Now. She has leaned out of the window and is waving her arms."

"By Jove! it's a signal."

"Yes."

"But it doesn't seem to be for us."

"No, we are screened from her view. I am certain she cannot see us from the win-

(Continued on page thirteen)

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Every man has some memory, usually of his boyhood, that he never forgets. Do you ever think of the days years ago when you sold the Blade and Ledger. How you tucked your papers under your arm and started out on your first business venture?

Those were great days for you. The whole world lay at your feet. You were starting out on the great up-hill climb. You had come to the point where you had made up your mind to try for things, instead of being content to cry for them.

You wanted to earn and learn. You knew that to loaf was to lose. Those sturdy qualities in you were urging you on to do something. You wanted to learn how to do greater things than you were doing.

Your first step in this course was when you took the agency to sell the Blade and Ledger. That meant that you put yourself in the way of learning things. That meant you were arming yourself for the fight. When you look back, doesn't everything you learned then help you now?

This talk is to ask you to recall to your mind your feelings at that time, as you see them in the light of the things you have done so far. We ask you to look down from the top of the hill you have climbed and tell us of the road.

Since you started you have hit many snags, struck many rocks, but you had learned and you kept your eyes on the goal that you saw in those days as a Blade and Ledger agent.

Remember how tickled you were when you got a new customer? And how you used to plan and plan to try to sell the papers to that man on the corner who never seemed to become interested? How light-hearted you were when you finally "cornered" him and he bought his first paper from you? How you wanted to quit when things seemed to go wrong? How much easier it was after you had learned?

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The army of agents produced each year, five, ten, fifteen or even twenty-two years ago, have spread far and wide. They have become older, assumed greater cares, but they never forget the days they sold the Blade and Ledger.

The bond between us is a strong one. It represents a friendship from boyhood up. Your fights have been our fights. Your falls have been our falls and now success has reached us both. Let us enjoy that success together. Like the old soldiers, let us talk over the struggle and the things that helped us win that struggle.

We often receive letters from old-time agents. They tell us what selling the Blade and Ledger did for them, and their experiences as agents years ago.

They have seen the good in it. They have been through it and know. They have seen how it worked out with themselves and they want to help others. They all wish us continued success in the work we are doing.

Fathers of boys ask us to appoint their sons agents so the son can learn the things they learned when they were boys selling the Blade and Ledger. We have heard from many of our old-time agents, but we want to hear from all of them. That is why we are publishing this message.

We ask you to open up the old days with us. In a word, we want a letter from you, telling us of your boyhood agency and time between now and then. We want a photo of your store, office, or place of business, of your family and of yourself. We want you to tell us of the struggle and what help the things you learned selling the Blade and Ledger were to you in that struggle.

We want an expression of your loyalty to us and your faith in us. Your letters will encourage us. They will help other parents to see the advantages they can so easily bring to their sons, and you will enjoy living once more your boyhood days.

Our old-time friends will answer this call with enthusiasm. They will all sit down right away and write to us.

There are no prizes for the best worded letter. We are not looking for a high-sounded piece of literature. We want just a personal letter as from friend to friend.

There is nothing to prompt our friends to go to the trouble of writing us other than their loyalty to us and their interest in the boys of today who will be the men of the future.

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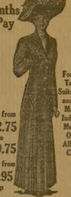

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Her Captive Bandit;

Or, In the Lion's Lair.

By Colonel Harper Hamilton

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CHAPTER VIII.
RELATIVES ARE FOUND.

THREE days passed quietly. Rackley Gold remained on the ranch and outwardly took the interest in the place that was to be expected of an owner home after a long absence, but he did not exert authority. The hands pronounced him a good brother, for he approved of all Burdilla had done, and left the conduct of affairs to her, for the present.

Nobody had come from Gideon Gap, either as friend or foe. Jack Hardy, however, had been there, and the news of the town was known. Sheriff Damon was still there, boarding at the hotel, but one of his men was missing. It was known that he had sent that man off in a hurry, and, presumably, to get fresh orders from his superiors.

There was a lull, possibly with a storm brewing.

Rackley Gold, having become Wayland Clarke, had interviewed Jack to get needed information. Wayland's history was a bit dim, after so many years, but Jack had gathered the loose ends from conversation he had heard in various quarters. Wayland had been reckless, dissipated, high-tempered and quarrelsome, and, as the final act proved lawless.

At that time one James Allen lived on an adjacent ranch. Wayland fell in love with Allen's daughter, proposed, was rejected, and then forcibly seized her and one of Allen's horses and tried to escape; but was pursued, overtaken, and once swung up to a tree with a rope about his neck. Calmer counsel prevailed, and his life was spared, but he was given choice between immediate and permanent absence and a repetition of the lynch-law episode. He elected to go and went, and no word had ever come from him.

The Allens had long since left the country, so that affair seemed to be relegated to the background, but tongues had been loosened by the alleged homecoming of Wayland Clarke, and his counterfeit had not taken to himself an enviable reputation.

The morning of the fourth day Jack Hardy had business that took him across North Ridge, to the upper valley where the horses were. Rackley started to walk with him, but, reaching the point where Brandy Run emerged from the hills, a longing to go to the wild places came over the road-agent. Excusing himself to Jack, he wandered into the tangled region, going where the depressions made walking easy, and having a design to visit the higher region farther away.

He was still going when, threading a valley, he came suddenly upon a man and a boy. The man he recognized at once, knowing him to be Hart Groom, a shiftless miner of the hills. He lived in a gulch, and Rackley had seen a woman and a child about the premises, on some of his casual trips, but had never been near the shack where they dwelt, nor, as far as he was aware, did they know him.

Nearing the pair, now, he noticed that the man was regarding him intently. There was a half-perplexed look in the man's face, and Rackley wished he had not met them. That close regard was suggestive.

Groom's movements slackened until he came to a full halt.

"Good morning, Mr. Clarke!" he said, half-diffidently.

"Good morning," Rackley returned courteously.

"I saw you come this way, after leaving Jack Hardy, so I took this boy and came to meet you. I've seen you, from a distance, at the ranch, too. I heard you was back."

"Did you?"

"Yes."

The miner could not seem to shift his gaze from Rackley's face. He looked long, sharply, and seemed to be in a deep study. Like one poring over a puzzling map, he dwelt upon the face, and if he found light he did not give proof of it in his expression. Suddenly he changed his manner and threw his head back sharply.

"You know me, don't you?" he demanded curtly.

"I don't think I do," the road-agent replied seriously.

"I'm Hart Groom!"

The revelation was made as if it was expected to convey a good deal, and a new study of face was before Rackley. Hostility gleamed there, and he knew Hart Groom had no love for him. But why?

Suddenly the man jerked the boy forword and pointed to him with his free hand.

"Know him?" he demanded sharply.

"No," responded Rackley steadily.

"That's Danny Groom, my sister's child, and your son!"

Hart was nothing if not direct. The words leaped bullet-like from his lips, and his small eyes flamed. He glared upon his adult companion as if longing to leap upon him in hostility, and his face twitched with emotion. Intense feeling was back of it all, and intense hostility. The child, looking at Rackley, shrank close to his protector, plainly frightened, and the men had the matter to themselves.

Hart had made a dramatic climax, but took away its edge without giving it chance to do its work. Another wave of emotion came over him, and he flung up a brown hand with unconscious tragedy.

"I know who he is, if you don't!" he cried, half-wildly. "I've cared for him that should be in his father's house, and sharer in his father's wealth. Now, Mr. Clarke, I don't want to be violent, nor to be mad with you, for Delia wouldn't like it, and she's good, she is. I want to be friendly. I've been watchin' for a chance to see you quiet-like, an'—an' maybe you was comin' to my house now?"

His voice sank, and it was almost as if he pleaded for confirmation of his suggestion. Clearly, he hovered between anger and hope of good will.

Rackley Gold found himself facing a crisis. A new problem was thrust upon him, and it was so enveloped in darkness that he could not grapple with it intelligently. Something he understood, and more he suspected, but the impetuous mood of Hart Groom helped him to the understanding.

"I hope," that person pursued, "you have come to say you will do what is right. Think what it has been for us while you've been away! Del.a has been so noble, she has. She might have called this boy Danny Clarke, as she had right to do, but she has called him Danny Groom. 'When Wayland comes back he shall not have reason to blame me,' says she, as noble as a martyr. Mr. Clarke, you don't know what it has been!" and again Hart flung up his hand in tragic fashion.

Rackley walked to an outcropping ledge, sat down and motioned his new acquaintance to do the same. Hart obeyed, while the lad nestled to his side and eyed the road-agent anxiously and timidly.

Rackley felt there was no way of escaping the dilemma, and he took up the thread of the mystery steadfastly.

"Let's get at this," he replied. "We will be as peaceful as you wish. What do you want of me?"

"I want," answered Hart, with swift directness, "that you should acknowledge Delia as your wife, and this here boy as your son, an' take them both to your ranch. I ask nothin' for myself; not one penny!"

"It would be rather a surprise to all," the road-agent continued, "if I did this. What would my father say? Who here knows me as a married man?"

"I can't say about your father. As to who knows, it's nobody. But, Mr. Clarke, we can produce the marriage certificate an' the minister. You married Delia secretly, but them things remain to tell of it."

"Where is the minister?"

"You shall know when you have acknowledged your wife an' child."

"Where is the certificate?"

"I'll bring that, any time."

Rackley was silent. Until the last two questions were asked truth had seemed to color Hart's words and manner. He still spoke stoutly, but Rackley suspected that neither certificate nor minister could be produced. That did not deny the fact that Hart Groom claimed like one who had justice on his side, and the road-agent believed that his predecessor on the ranch had gone through a marriage ceremony with Delia Groom. Whether it was a lawful marriage was uncertain, but he held the opinion it was.

"Why," he asked mildly, "have you never presented that certificate during my absence?"

"Delia said you wouldn't like it."

"Go and get it now, if you please."

"What do you want of it?" demanded Hart suspiciously. "You wouldn't destroy that paper, would ye, Mr. Clarke?"

"I shall not destroy it."

"An' won't you take Delia an' the boy to your house, an' acknowledge them? Danny was born two months after you went away, eight years ago, so I don't suppose you have known you had a son, but here he is. See him! As fine a boy as ever you see! Won't you acknowledge him?"

Rackley surveyed the lad critically. Hart was tall, lank and bony, and he was uneducated, ignorant and of low class. The child was plainly of higher order. Rackley, however, looked in vain for any resemblance to Burdilla or Daniel Clarke.

The fictitious Wayland found himself in a predicament. The life of the real Wayland menaced him. How was he to meet this crisis? He wanted to do justice to all parties concerned, and he had a tangled road to travel. He dared not accept Hart Groom's claim, nor to deny him. The only resort was the way of the craven, but it must be used.

"You ask what will make trouble at the house during my father's lifetime," he finally replied. "Daniel Clarke is a violent man. I do not like the idea of angering him, but—you know how ill he is. He can't last long. I must ask you to wait a while."

"We have waited eight years already!" flamed Hart, his face growing hard. "Those long years! An' now you ask us to wait longer!"

Rackley had marked out his trail, and he followed it. Long he sat there, arguing with his companion, seeking to achieve delay. He was always calm, but Hart hovered between entreaty and anger. There was something more. At times his gaze sought Rackley's face and he studied it in a puzzled way. The road-agent believed he understood. Groom had admitted having seen Wayland Clarke but once. Now, as Rackley studied it out, Hart failed to see the likeness of the real Wayland in his companion. Thus far the miner was merely perplexed, but the truth might soon come to him.

In the end Rackley won the point for which he contended, and Groom agreed to wait. Whether he would permit delay until Daniel Clarke passed way he would not say then, but he agreed to a respite. One thing only brought him to this pass; it was that Rackley promised to call at the gulch shack and see the mother of young Danny.

Here the road-agent's better nature rebelled. He hated the treachery of a broken pledge, and only the suspicion that it must come to that, whether he wished it or not, led him to promise.

At last they arose and stood ready to separate.

"Mr. Clarke," reminded the miner, "you have given no attention to your child. Danny, go to your father!"

Releasing the small hand, he pushed the boy forward, but the latter, finding himself free, took to his heels and fled precipitately, his course toward home. Hart looked annoyed, but made no comment.

"We shall look for you, Mr. Clarke," he said. "You have promised."

"I have, and I've only good will for you," replied Rackley.

"That's what we want. We are not bad folks, if we are uneducated. Delia is good, she is. Well, I'll go, but—remember you have promised!"

He backed off, took another of his puzzled surveys of Rackley's face, and then went his way. Nor was the other man long at the spot. Rackley turned toward his own new home.

He went, carrying Wayland's Clarke's past with him. Another danger was added to his load.

CHAPTER IX.
INTRODUCES HIMSELF.

"I can't understand why you ever became a road-agent!"

It was two days after the meeting by Brandy Run, and Rackley and Burdilla were standing near the ranch-house. One of the employes had just brought word that Simon Snow, true to his ruling passion, had organized a grand hunt, and was that day to lead thirty men in a systematic search for the bold outlaw of Tiger-foot Range. It was his avowed purpose to bring Rackley Gold in before another day dawned, but if there was delay, the hunters were to

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GENTLE JABS.

Fools often serve as horrible examples.

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Every man is above the average—to hear him tell it.

Many a man sees his duty in time to dodge it.

Absence makes the picture post cards accumulate.

Some men need to be called down about twice a day.

Speaking of resolutions—the good nearly always die young.

By making use of the knowledge you have you will gain more.

Elbow-grease is a standard oil, and it pays good dividends.

If you would keep your friends don't put them to a severe test.

When it comes to finding fault, even a detective can make good.

A light lunch might be the result of a blonde hair in the butter.

How a poor man lords it over one who is a little poorer than himself!

If hard luck drives a man to drink, prosperity would have ruined him.

Strenuous babies are responsible for many meek and lowly parents.

Occasionally a man avoids straitened circumstances by being crooked.

Hang on to old friends until you see how the new bunch is going to pan out.

The nearer a man comes to understanding a woman the more he wishes he didn't.

Honeyed phrases have a bitter taste when you are compelled to eat your words.

When the yellow streak begins to work out of some people they have a fit of the blues.

Women may come and women may go, but a man can always depend upon his mother.

When a bachelor maid encounters a bachelor man it takes a lot of wind out of her sails.

Baseball umpires and horse-show judges have almost as many friends as a homeless yellow dog.

And we once heard of a man who wrote a book on "How to Get Rich" who had actually done it himself.

After a man gets on the shady side of 40 love doesn't trouble him half as much as rheumatism does.

A girl who sits and waits for a man to propose must feel a good deal like a cat that is watching a rathole.

No woman is quite sure what things are stored away on the top shelf of the closet in the spare bedroom upstairs.

After a girl has been married a year or two she begins to generate a lot of respect for women who remain in the spinster class.

It is almost as difficult for a girl who is poor and plain to get into smart society as it is for a rich man to crawl through the eye of a needle.

(Continued from page five.)

stick to their work. Provisions for a three-day campaign had been taken along.

All this amused Rackley, idling by Daniel Clarke's door, and he indulged in considerable grim banter. He harbored a secret disappointment because he could not be in the hills to take part in the hunt, but said nothing to that effect, fearing that Burdilla's feelings might be hurt if he seemed lukewarm about staying where he was.

Her remark grew out of their talk on the subject.

"What," he asked, "is it you can't understand?"

"You are educated, mild when you see fit, kind-hearted—why, I can't conceive of your being a road-agent."

"I infer you have never been one yourself?"

"Never!" she admitted, smiling.

"That's why you fail to see the point. I'll try to elucidate. I like the wild places, with their ridges, valleys, rocks, caves, trees, and animals, but even these things would pall after a while. Stagnant blood, like stagnant water, gets lifeless. Coveting action, dash, excitement, an occasional hazard and a good-natured gamble, I took to the calling of a road-agent. I did it without animosity, and that has ever been my mood. Ever hear that I killed or wounded my victims?"

"Never!"

"There you have it. Some road-agents are rash and bad-tempered, and do violent things. With me, the calling is just gay recreation. Some folks like boating, some hunting, some riding, some society, and so on, for their amusement. I find mine in road-agentry. It's been a great source of jollification for me!"

"You don't mention the money that—that changes hands when you hold up a stage or horseman."

"I had forgotten that. Well, I am not yet in position to rival Rothschild."

"I know why!" Burdilla cried. "Tales are told in the hills and valleys that Rackley Gold has been a free-giver to the poor. If anybody is sick, or otherwise in need, why, Rackley Gold suddenly appears and money is theirs."

"Are you not thinking of Claude Duval, the old-time highwayman?" Rackley asked, his eyes twinkling.

"I'm thinking of you, sir!" she exclaimed quickly. "Now you know what your reputation is along this region. A giver to the poor!"

"No doubt," replied the road-agent seriously, "these people slander me. Why should I thus squander my hard-earned money?"

"Ah!" Burdilla answered, with a smile and a sigh, "you are so very odd! I know, and yet I fail to understand."

"Turn your mind back to our first talk. I pictured myself with great candor then. The freedom, the excitement——"

He stopped short, with his attention fixed elsewhere, and added:

"A horseman from the direction of Gideon Gap. Do you know him? Stay! I believe that is my old acquaintance, Alfonso Hay, who so kindly identified me when Sheriff Damon felt critical."

"It is he. I wonder why he comes? I've dreamed of him twice, and always he has been betraying you to Damon. I'm more afraid of Alfonso than I'd be if he were vicious of nature."

"Weakness sometimes has an envenomed tooth. We'll see what Mr. Hay has to say."

Alfonso came nearer, riding with marked awkwardness for one so long in the West. He was in amiable mood, and his face was expanded in a smile. He waved his hand and finally reined in near them. Rackley, himself smiling blandly, went forward a few paces, and, putting out his hand, gave a cordial greeting.

"Glad to see you again, pard!" he said. "It's kind of you to drop in on me. Dismount, and let us renew old times."

"Sorry," answered Alfonso, "but I can't stop. Good morning, Miss Clarke. Fine day! Wayland, can I talk with you alone—if it will not be impolite to the young lady?"

Burdilla was curious, but she realized the need of keeping Hay in good humor, and she withdrew a short distance.

"Now, see here, Wayland," continued Alfonso abruptly, "I can't stop long. I've changed my business calling. Got a rise in the world in a monetary sense, having become a tailor's apprentice. When Gideon Gap becomes a great city I aim to control the clothes-making industry, having a monopoly. But that is not to the point, except that I am expected back soon by my—hum—my master. Say, old pard, Simon Snow has taken a posse of thirty men and gone to the hills to hunt for Rackley Gold!"

Alfonso wound up with a nod and a wink and Rackley drew conclusions.

"It is too late," the road-agent said warily, "for me to make one of the hunters."

"Ha, ha! Good! I wanted you to know, so you wouldn't take a stroll that way. Oh! say, I recognized you, first thing, when Damon brought me here. It was a total surprise, and I wonder that I made no bad break, but my wonderful self-control stood me in good use. Rackley Gold posing as Wayland Clarke, and accepted as such by Miss Burdilla, was a crusher, but I pulled myself together, and you remember how I identified you as Wayland. Great head I've got. Know how I recognized you?"

Rackley was wondering if a trick lay back of this talk, but he remained composed.

"How was it?" he asked.

"You've forgotten me, but not I you. Two years ago, you held me up as I rode alone in the hills, and took all I had, which was half an hour of my time. Finding I possessed neither money nor a watch, you gave me a dollar and a timepiece. I've got the watch now. I found you a jolly, chummy chap, and I've always liked you. I was riding a blind pinto. Remember me now?"

Rackley did remember. Before he could say so, the voluble caller resumed:

"You had a mask on, but it fell off by some mischance. It has been said at Gideon Gap that I am the only man there that ever saw you, unmasked, near at hand. I reckon that's so. Mr. Gold, when this present excitement dies away I'd like it immensely if you would give me pointers on how to play the road-agent with success—mind you, with success. Then I would go off somewhere by myself and start in, trying to copy after you. Great guns! how it would tickle me to have men talking about Alfonso Hay, the famous road-agent!"

The amiable little man, looking about as inoffensive as a fly, fairly radiated the joy of coming events. Then he sobered a trifle.

"I want to be like you, a hero!" he added.

Rackley had his man before him, his innocent mind wrong side out. It was impossible to fail to read him. There was no guile in Alfonso, and he could not be regarded as a possible emissary of designing men. More, it was certain that he realized fully who Rackley was, and that any effort to deny him would be folly.

Hazardous as the step was, Alfonso must be accepted as a confidential friend. Gold said a few pleasant things, and then his companion remembered something further.

"There is more news for you from the Gap. That confounded Damon has sent far and wide to get men who knew Wayland Clarke in the old days. He seems suspicious that you are not what you claim to be, in spite of my identification—says I am frivolous, and may be in error, hang him—so he has got messengers pounding the trail here and yon, hunting old residents of this vicinity. Wants you identified further. Bah! Well, let him bring them here. If they say you are not the man you claim to be, I'll deny it, and that will settle it, or—it ought to. I knew Wayland well—or, to be more exact, I knew him ill. There was no good in the knave. Tricky, dissipated, lawless—but don't tell his sister I said so!"

Alfonso was getting anxious to be gone, so Rackley added to his friendly words, and asked that he keep them informed of changes at the Gap, and finally the little fellow galloped awkwardly away.

Rackley and Burdilla compared notes.

"Today's hunt for the road-agent counts for nothing except a joke on Simon Snow," said the counterfeit owner, "but it is serious that men are being hunted for to identify me further. That device must succeed ultimately, for the earth has not swallowed everybody up, but let us hope the old residents are far from here."

"I'm afraid of Alfonso Hay," exclaimed Burdilla.

"Afraid of him? Why?"

"He occasionally goes on sprees. Suppose he repeats? Will he keep his secret when in liquor?"

It was a troublesome problem, and was discussed at some length. Burdilla finally said she would take the first opportunity to see Hay and beseech him to drink nothing. The pledge of a man addicted to overuse of strong drink was not a strong rod to lean upon, but the plan was worth trying.

Presently the girl entered the house and Rackley walked away among the buildings, seeking something in the way of action to lessen the dullness of the solitary hour. Walking, he caught sight of a fat, broad-shouldered, ragged man who was also walking idly. It was Mathew, the tramp, but Rackley now saw him for the first time.

Mathew, seeing him in return, came nearer, revealing his pockmarked face more clearly and arousing antipathy in Rackley's mind. The latter thought he saw a typical, worthless, vicious wanderer of the earth, and would have avoided him, but Mathew was of another mind. He deliberately blocked Rackley's way.

"Hallo, you!" he saluted gruffly.

It was not a respectful address, and the road-agent caught a decided note of hostility, but he ignored it.

"Hallo!" he returned easily.

"You were pointed out to me as owner of this ranch."

"Quite likely."

"It must be pleasant," pursued Mathew, half-belligerently, "to own such a fine place. I reckon you feel yourself in clover!"

Rackley caught a new note now, an unfriendly, mysterious something that perplexed him. He surveyed the wreck of a man more critically, but saw no more than a tramp. Acute as he was, that odd something eluded him. Not seeing any reason why he should be interested, he gave it up.

"This is a good property," he answered quietly.

"That's what I call it. Broad acres, horses, cattle. That spells wealth. You have got a good thing here. Owned it long?"

"A dozen years or so."

"Oh! Well, what do you suppose I own?"

"I really can't say."

Mathew smoothed his ragged garments.

"These clothes!" he said harshly. "Fine property, eh? Fate deals cards strangely, doesn't it? I am down—just now! I may come up. That isn't what I have to say, though. I am resting here for a few days until my health improves. The hands feed me, but I am thirsty. Will you give me a gallon of whisky for my private consumption?"

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"You have already been drinking."

"I have moderately. A mere thimblefull! My stomach burns for a liberal dose. Do I get it?"

It was no whining suppliant that stood before Rackley. Mathew held his hostile manner, and his unpleasant face was still hostile. Had he been intending a personal attack he could hardly have looked more aggressive. Not being timid, Rackley held no personal fear, and when it occurred to him that this wretch, angered, might possibly do harm to the cause he had in hand, he decided to act a good-natured part.

"I don't happen to know where to find even a gill of liquor, but I will speak to the men. You shall have what you want, in moderation. I'll attend to it as soon as possible."

With this Rackley walked on. Mathew did not thank him, neither did he try to say more. He watched the receding man, his eyes glittering with fresh animosity. Then his lips curled in a sneer.

"In moderation!" he muttered. "He begrudges me a proper amount of drink, and he's got the ranch for his own—just now! I'll remember his parsimony at the reckoning. At the reckoning!"

Meanwhile Rackley was himself thinking.

"If I am betrayed, who will do it? Miss Clarke's four hands may be faithful, or they may not. Alfonso Hay may talk in his cups. Simon Snow may see me and know me. New enemies may come. I don't know the full list."

Perhaps he did not. For the time being he had forgotten Mathew. Why should he dwell upon the wretched wanderer?

CHAPTER X.

A WILD NIGHT RIDE.

Daniel Clarke, never a patient invalid, was in a particularly querulous mood. He had wanted a light made early, and when it was made he complained that the glare hurt his eyes, and wanted it out. Fifteen minutes later he demanded that it be relit, and as he was erratic in this particular, so he was in other things. His chief attendant, a woman called Betty, and who had three-quarters Indian blood in her veins, bore all without a murmur, but found herself kept busy.

It was past nine o'clock when Daniel took a new notion.

"I want my son!" he exclaimed. "I want Wayland, the child of my tender care. Go and bring him to me! Wait—don't go until I bid you. How does my noble son take to business? Has he improved affairs on the ranch since he came? A sharp man can do wonders in a week, and my son is shrewd, just like his father. Why don't you go and bring him? Be off with you!"

Betty had not expected that an answer was really desired from her, and, getting decisive orders, she went as directed. In the livingroom she found Burdilla, Rackley, and Jack Hardy in conversation.

"Who is the tramp we have on the ranch, Jack?" the girl had asked.

"Don't know, really," was the response. "I have not spoken with him myself. All I can say is that he's a rugged specimen of flotsam and jetsam, one or both, and too young to be such a show."

"I've seen him and talked with him," carelessly added Rackley. "I think his name is Mathew, but about all I really know is that he has a consuming thirst, and begged—demanded, rather—that I supply him with a gallon of whisky."

"I saw him just before dark," Burdilla explained. "My view was incomplete and brief, though. I met him among the shacks. I think he must be a very bashful man. Why, he actually ran from me and dived into his quarters. Seemed to be scared of me. I couldn't see whether he was white or black."

"His skin is tolerably white, but I won't answer for him further. Probably he ran because he thought you might intend to order him away."

"It suits my fancy to think he is bashful. They tell me he is badly marked by smallpox, but I had no chance to see."

At this moment Betty appeared with her message.

"Go to father if you will, Wayland," urged Burdilla. "He is very restless, and may be quieted by you. He likes you."

"A father should like his son," asserted Jack, wishing to impress the Indian woman. "It's natural. I'll wait for you, Mr. Clarke."

Rackley answered and started to obey the summons. On his way he passed a Chinaman, one Hop Soy by name, and the cook of the establishment. He gave the man a cheery word and went on. Reaching Daniel Clarke's room he first knocked and then entered without more ceremony. The semi-paralyzed man was leaning heavily back in his chair, his great head rolling restlessly from side to side and erratic mutterings falling from his lips, but he brightened up wonderfully at sight of the caller.

"Hallo!" he exclaimed brusquely. "So you have come to see an old hulk. That's hearty of you! I was thinking of sending for you, but you have saved me the trouble. Welcome, Wayland, welcome, my good and dutiful son!"

He held out a ponderous hand, which the road-agent took and pressed with assumed warmth. He had forgotten sending a message, but that was his way.

"And how," he inquired, "is the lion of Pike's Peak?"

"Lion? Pah—jackal, rather! Hyena, buzzard, prairie-dog, or something of that sort. A worn-out man, sir; a hot heart imprisoned in a half-dead shell. Time was, sir, when I was hearty as any man. And strong—look at that hand! See the size of it! Why, I could break a crowbar in two at a single clutch. If you don't believe me, so much the worse for you. I'm down now, unhorsed, broken, chair-ridden, hard hit! You are young—aha! my noble son Wayland, it does me good to gaze upon you! I'm proud of you, my son!"

"Glad to hear it, sir."

"Of course you are. The whelp of the lion craves flattery while the lion lives, after which the whelp can care for himself. The dead lion may go hang! Don't take the word 'whelp' in an offensive light; you know I have deep love for you, son!"

"I realize that fully."

"I think," pursued Daniel, with a sarcastic smile, "that you greatly resemble me in looks."

"I ought to," said Rackley, bolstering up the joke.

"Like me in looks, character, everything, even to my own jolly ways. Let's see—how goes that song of ours?

"'My name was Captain Kidd,
And so wickedly I did,
God's laws I did forbid
When I sailed, when I sailed!'"

Daniel had rallied, and he roared out the words with volume which filled the room and swept from the house. Paralysis did not extend to his lungs. Singing, he grew boisterously jovial, and ended with a big, cyclonic laugh.

"That's the figure, Captain Kidd!" he added. "I like the tale of your great deeds. Your quarter-deck was a scene of jollity and noble endeavor. Don't talk to me about the Crusaders; I say you knocked them all higher than Haman for real chivalry and so forth. Especially the 'and so forth!' A rare old pirate, you!"

"Pity you were not along, sir," suggested Rackley.

Daniel stopped, changed expression, winked cunningly and, lowering his voice, answered:

"All the pirates are not on the high seas. I've done that in my day that puts me into the best class in school. Sixty years I've fought the world, and no man has got the better of me. Some say they have got the worst, and I reckon they are right. Now, there's the matter of that Good News mine that the confounded sheriff is growling about. He says it has gone to smash and all hands have lost their money. Say, my lad, I can tell you one stockholder who is nothing out. Oho! all the pirates are not on deck nor before the mast."

With this the speaker fell to rubbing his hands, and while his eyes twinkled and his head nodded, he chuckled with fresh amusement.

Rackley felt a strong desire to pitch him out of the window, but he remembered Burdilla and continued to act his part. Conversation was matter-of-fact for a time, but Clarke wound around to the old subject.

"Let them howl about that mine!" he snapped. "They won't find any cash. I've fixed that. Still, all would not be rosy if they could raid this ranch. Do you think there is any danger that they will learn you are not my son?"

"Softly, softly!" urged Rackley. "Walls have ears."

"Not in my house! Nobody listens here, and if they did I would pin their ears to the wall. Don't be nervous, Captain Kidd. It's not like you. But I was asking if you thought anybody suspected you were not my son."

"I hope nobody does suspect."

"A pretty trick we are playing! Here you are only a ranch-hand, and, with my consent, you claim to be my son——"

"I beg, Mr. Clarke, that you will lower your voice."

"And I say I won't lower it! Hang it all! who are you to give me orders? Captain

(Continued on page twelve.)

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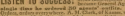

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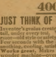

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"My heart became weak and uncertain in its action and that frightened me. Finally my physican told me, about a year ago, that I must stop drinking coffee or I could never expect to be well again.

"I was in despair, for the very thought of the medicines I had tried so many times, nauseated me. I thought of Postum, but could hardly bring myself to give up the coffee.

"Finally I concluded that I owed it to myself to give Postum a trial. So I got a package and carefully followed the directions, and what a delicious, nourishing, rich drink it was! Do you know I found it very easy to shift from coffee to Postum and not mind the change at all?

"Almost immediately after I made the change I found myself better, and as the days went by I kept on improving. My nerves grew sound and steady. I slept well and felt strong and well-balanced all the time.

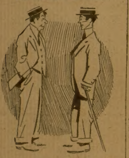
"Now I am completely cured, with the old nervousness and sickness all gone. In every way I am well once more."

It pays to give up the drink that acts on some like a poison, for health is the greatest fortune one can have.

Read the little book, "The Road to Wellville," in pkgs. "There's a Reason."

Ever read the above letter? A new one appears from time to time. They are genuine, true, and full of human interest.

The Knock-Out Four.



Hampton—Say, boy, if you'd heard our quartet last night you'd have been carried away.

Rhodes—I don't know. I can stand a lot of punishment.

Alcohol Is a Preservative.

Alcohol is recognized the world over as the proper, most efficient and wholesome preserver of medicinal compounds, and while some journalists try to alarm the world by the cry that patent "medicines contain more alcohol than beer," they neglect to state that proprietary medicines are taken in doses from a teaspoonful to a tablespoonful, while beer is a beverage that is consumed in quantities from a glass to several quarts a day.

Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound contains only 18% alcohol, simply enough to preserve the roots and herbs from which it is made, and may be relied upon by every woman in the land as a reliable, honest and sure remedy for the ills peculiar to her sex.

Unchecked Paternalism.

"I can not understand," wrote the college boy, "why you call yourself a kind father. For three weeks I've had no check from you. Pray, what sort of kindness do you call that?"

And the father wrote back: "Unremitting kindness."

As Corrected.

"Young man," said the home-grown philosopher, "it is best to begin at the beginning."

"Not if you want to go up a river, it isn't," answered the wise youth.

Big Guns.

Lord Kitchener, at one of the dinners tendered him in New York, apologized for his want of eloquence.

"I can't speak: that is why I don't," he said. "I think it is better to keep silent than to put you to sleep.

"The officers of the British army are noted for their inability to make a public speech. Whenever an officer is foolish enough to answer a toast the guests say to one another significantly as he sits down:

"'Well, you know, the bigger the gun the bigger the bore.'"

Making Assurance Doubly Sure.

"Johnnie!"

"Yes'm?"

"Why are you sitting on that boy's face?"

"Why I—"

"Didn't I always tell you to count a hundred before you gave way to passion and struck another boy?"

"Yes'm, and I'm doin' it; I'm just sittin' on his face so he'll be here when I'm done countin' the hundred."

Habit of Solicitude.

"Your wife seemed very much excited about your airship trip."

"Yes," replied the aviator. "She always worries about my health."

"Was she afraid you'd get a fall?"

"No. She said she was sure I'd take my death of cold sitting up there in all those drafts."

But She Made It Warm.

"My good woman," said the friend to the sorely tried better half of the worthless man, "did you ever try heaping coals of fire on your husband's head?"

"No, I don't believe I ever did," she replied, "but I've thrown a lighted lamp at him two or three times."

Limit.

Wifey—It states in this magazine, Henry, that the shortest men on earth are the Laplanders.

Hubby—H'm! They couldn't be any shorter than an American man after his summer vacation.

Not Always.

"All is not gold that glitters," quoted the moralizer.

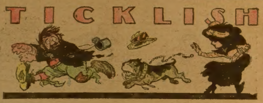
"No," rejoined the demoralizer, "and neither is about 95 per cent of what is estimated as gold in a mining prospectus."

HOW IT ORIGINATED.

"That fills the bill," was heard
For the first time as a term
When one morn the early bird
Had caught the early worm.

Enterprise.

Newsboy (to newcomer as he turns around from signing hotel register)—Extra! Extra! All about your arrival and which hotel you're stopping at.



Failure.

"I never have my umbrella up when it's raining," said the chronic grouch, "unless it's raining money."

"And in that case," said the wise guy, "you wouldn't have sense enough to turn it upside down."

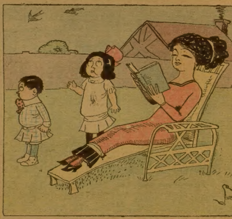
Making the Best of It.

"Yes," said the lady caller, "my husband is a born diplomat, if I do say it myself."

"A born diplomat!" echoed the hostess.

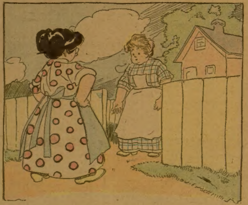
"Yes," rejoined the lady caller. "Or, in other words, when he can't have his own way he pretends that my way is his."

FORCE OF HABIT.



Little Girl—Mummy! (No answer) Mummy! are those swallows?
Mummy (deep in her book)—Yes, dear. Don't touch them.

GOES THROUGH HIS POCKETS.



Mrs. Hewitt—Sleep is a great restorer.

Mrs. Jewett—Yes; in some ways. It's only when John's asleep that I can get the money that's coming to me.

To WOMEN WHO DREAD MOTHERHOOD

Information How They May Give Birth to Happy, Healthy Children Absolutely Without Pain—Sent Free.

No woman need any longer dread the pains of childbirth; or remain childless. Dr. J. H. Dye has devoted his life to relieving the sorrows of women. He has proved that all pain at childbirth may be entirely banished, and he will gladly tell you how it may be done absolutely free of charge. Send your name and address to Dr. J. H. Dye, 200 Lewis Block, Buffalo, N. Y., and he will send you, postpaid, his wonderful book which tells how to give birth to happy, healthy children, absolutely without pain; also how to cure sterility. Do not delay but write today.

Shown His Duty.

Mr. Jawback—Who's going to bring up this family—me or you?

Mrs. Jawback—Me. You are going down and bring up some coal.

LADIES, PRESERVE YOUR YOUTHFUL APPEARANCE.

Madame Mignette's Beauty Cream and Skin Food removes every defect, spot, freckle, pimple, blemish or wrinkle, leaving the skin soft, clear and smooth. It is perfectly harmless and will not injure the most delicate skin. It preserves and brings back the youthful glow to the face and ruddiness to the cheeks, preserving it in this condition until extreme old age. This preparation has been used for years and hundreds are now using it and are more than delighted with the results. Send us ten (10) cents for formula which you can have filled at any drug store at a very small cost. Do not delay, but write at once. Box 491, Blairsville, Pa.

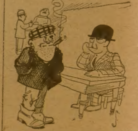
Not Business.

Beggar—Say, mister, would you give a poor fellow a quarter to save his life?

Stranger—I should say I wouldn't. I'm an undertaker.

Do you want a beautiful Seven-Piece Bed Set Free? See the Hagood announcement on back page.

Disappointed.



Blinky, the Dip—Did youse get much out of dat safe youse opened?

Skinny, the Peter—Naw. It wasn't what it was cracked up to be.

2 Full Gallons Straight Whiskey, $2.87

Less Than Wholesale Price to Saloonkeepers

For years we sold to the saloonkeeper, and built up a big trade, but expense of collecting, losses on collections, the tremendous cost of paying traveling salesmen their expenses, and the very stringent local option laws in some sections have compelled us to cut out the saloonkeeper and sell direct to the consumer for less than the saloonkeeper paid before. We can do this because we do not give credit and have no losses. The whiskey we sold on credit to saloonkeepers for $1.75 we can sell you on two gallon orders for $1.43 per gallon cash. Here's our offer:

2 FULL GALS. Fine, High Grade $5 Straight Whiskey, $2.87

MONEY BACK without question if not as represented. Try it to your heart's content before deciding to keep it.

Our Liberal Offer: Send us $2.87 and we will send you, same day order is received, **2 Full Gallons** of fine, pure, straight whiskey, rich, mellow and good. Not a colored, raw, white spirit whiskey but a straight whiskey aged in wood and in bond. Try it and test it in any way you wish and if you do not find it to be the best whiskey you ever bought, at twice the price, send it back and we will return your money. Send P. O. Order, Express Money Order or Bank Draft. Do not send personal checks. We cannot afford to pay exchange when we sell our goods so low. This is an unheard-of low price, but go to your saloon dealer and ask him what he pays for whiskey by the barrel in large quantities—the kind which he charges you 10c or 15c per drink. If he tells you the truth you will find he pays from $1.50 to $1.75 per gallon. Under our special offer you can buy 2-gallon lots at a smaller price than your dealer pays in large quantities by the barrel. Why should you pay more? We quote for larger quantities as follows:

5 Gallon Keg . . $7.15 | 25 Gal. Half Bbl. $33.10
10 Gallon Keg . . 13.41 | 50 Gallon Barrel 64.30

This special offer must call for 2 gallons at $2.87 or 1 gallon trial offer $1.64.

AMERICAN PURE FOOD COMPANY, Dept. D KANSAS CITY, MO.

TACKLES
ELLSWORTH YOUNG

A Long-Distance Feed.

The husky hobo had just sat down in the old farmhouse kitchen opposite the first square meal he had seen for a month.

"After you have finished eating," said the kind lady who was doing the hostess act, "I shall expect you to do some work in the garden."

"Wot time iz it now?" queried the hobo.

"Half past two," answered the lady.

"Shore I'll do de garden work for youse after I finish eatin', ma'am," replied the hungry traveler—"dat iz, ef dere's enny moon ternight."

Good News for the Deaf.

A celebrated New York Aurist has been selected to demonstrate to deaf people that deafness is a disease and can be cured rapidly and easily in your own home. He proposes to prove this fact by sending to any person having trouble with their ears a trial treatment of this new method absolutely free. We advise all people who have trouble with their ears to immediately address Dr. Edward Gardner, suite 313, No. 40 West Thirty-third street, New York City, and we wish to assure them that they will receive by return mail, absolutely free, a "Trial Treatment."

A Hard Moment.

"Well, Jim," said Bingleton, as he proudly showed off his first-born, "what do you think of that for a kid?"

"He's some kid, all right, all right," returned Jim, unemotionally.

"Think he looks like me, old man?" persisted Bingleton.

"H'm! Well—er—ah—hum—well, Bill—, well, old pal, to tell the truth, I'm afraid he does!" replied the embarrassed Jim.

Every Lady Read This.

Years ago when I was a sufferer, an old nurse told me of a wonderful cure for Leucorrhœa, Displacements, Painful Periods, Uterine and Ovarian troubles. It cured me in one month. It is a simple, harmless lotion that can be prepared by any one having the recipe. I will send it free to every suffering sister who writes to me. Address Mrs. A. Hudnut South Bend, Indiana.

A Queer One.

Hayrix—Ole Man Sparrowgrass air a queer sort uv critter, ain't he?

Oatcake—I dunno. What's queer erbout him?

Hayrix—Why, ez often ez I've heerd him discussin' polerticks deown t' th' grocery, I ain't never yit heerd him say what he'd do erbout straightenin' things out ef he wus President fer a couple uv hours, by grass!

J. P.

Those suffering from weakness and lack of vigor should take JUVEN PILLS. One box will tell a story of marvelous results. This medicine has more rejuvenating, vitalizing force than has ever before been offered. Sent postpaid only on receipt of this advertisement and $1. Made by its originators, C. I. HOOD CO., proprietors Hood's Sarsaparilla, LOWELL, MASS. (8)

When He Foozled.

"Your boy Josh is something of an expert at golf."

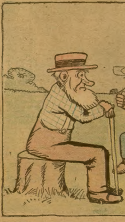
"I reckon," replied Farmer Corntossel, discontentedly. "But he can't make two licks with the scythe without foozlin'."

The Silver Lining.

Editor—Very sorry, Mr. Scribbler, but we find we will have to reduce salaries again.

Mr. Scribbler (a man of affairs)—That's all right. One more reduction, and they'll be so low that I can afford to start a paper myself.

CONUNDRUM.



Si—What made yer barn burn down?
Hy—Waal, I'll give ye three guesses, but if ye don't say fire, you lose.

Natural Affinity.

Tom—I understand Fred is engaged to Miss Gushington. I can't imagine what he can see in that girl to make him want to marry her.

Jack—Well, Fred has a mania for yachting, you know, and she's such a breezy creature that he naturally took a fancy to her.

The Real Danger.

"Why do you consider golf a dangerous game?" she asked in surprise.

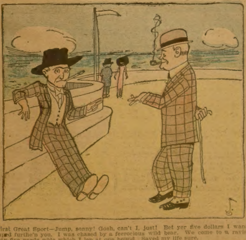
"Because," explained the old bachelor, "I had half a dozen friends who got engaged on the golf links last season."

Short Order.

"Won't you please give me an order?" pleaded the persistent drummer.

"Certainly," replied the crusty proprietor. "Get out!"

LONG JUMPS.



First Great Sport—Jump, sonny! Gosh, can't I, just! Bet yer five dollars I wanst jumped furthe'n you. I was chased by a feerocious wild bear. We come to a ravine thirty-five yards wide which I lep at one bound. Saved my life sure.

Second Great Sport—Good for you, guvner. But I think I can cut that. I was once chased by a blazing wild bull, and after running twenty-one miles came to a river forty yards wide which I cleared without a splash.

First Great Sport—O, waal, look what a run yer had.

Three Famous Men.

"Yes," said the native, "we have three famous men in our town—Smith, Jones, and Brown."

"What are they famous for?" queried the stranger within the gates.

"Smith is always talking about what he has done," explained the native, "and Jones talks about what he is going to do."

"And what does Brown talk about?" queried the stranger.

"Oh, he doesn't talk at all," answered the other. "He's too busy doing things."

Variety as the Spice.

"Don't you ever get tired of being made love to?" he asked.

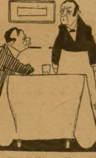
"No, indeed," replied the summer girl, "but I might if it were always the same man."

No Room for Argument.

"Any man who looks upon his wife as a burden," remarked Mrs. Naggsby, "is nothing but a beast."

"Right you are, my dear," rejoined Mr. Naggsby. "He's a beast of burden."

His Preference.



Waiter—Roast beef or cured ham, sir?
Patron—Bring me some beef. The last cured ham I ordered here was only convalescent.

Discovered.

"I don't believe that they really love one another."

"No?"

"No. He didn't even go home to lunch the first month of their married life."

AGENTS WANTED

BEACON LAMP BURNER FREE

Incandescent, 100 Candle Power. Burns common coal oil. Gives better light than gas, electricity or six ordinary lamps at one-sixth to one-tenth the cost. Fits your old lamp. Unequaled for fine sewing or reading. COSTS ONLY ONE CENT FOR SIX HOURS. We want one person in each locality to whom we can refer new customers. Take advantage of our special offer to secure a Beacon Burner FREE. Write today. Agents Wanted. HOME SUPPLY CO. 2?? K. C. Life Bldg., Kansas City, Mo.

$3 a Day Sure. Send us your address and we will show you how to make $3 a day absolutely sure. We furnish the work and teach you free, you work in the locality where you live. Send us your address and we will explain the business fully, remember we guarantee a clear profit of $3 for every day's work, absolutely sure. Write at once. ROYAL MANUFACTURING CO., Box 1646 Detroit, Mich.

AGENTS WANTED Sell our Big $1.00 Bottle Sarsaparilla for 35 cents. 200 Per Cent Profit. Best Seller. Finest Medicine. Complies with pure drug law. Everyone buys. Write now for terms. F. R. GREENE, 22 Lake St., Chicago

AGENTS WANTED

Easy Money For You

You can easily earn $5 to $10 a day taking orders for our Stylish, Made-to-Measure clothes—many agents earn more. No money or experience necessary—we teach you the business & back you with our capital. SUITS $9.00 up PANTS $2.50 up EXPRESS PREPAID $5.00 TO $10.00 A DAY. Every garment made to measure in latest city style—fit and workmanship guaranteed. One Hustling Agent wanted in every town. Exclusive territory. Write for agent's outfit FREE. THE PROGRESS TAILORING CO. 125 Harrison Street, - Chicago

AGENTS Guaranteed Hosiery is lightning seller. Nothing like it for making money. Free sample. FORSHEE CO., B 1009, Dayton, Ohio.

AGENTS WANTED to sell pocket knives with name and photo on handle; write for terms. Morris Cutlery Co., Morris, Ill., P.O.Box A

AGENTS, CREDIT, Perfumes, Flavors, etc. Big profits. Express Paid. Terms Free. HERBENE AGENCY CO., Box 282, Sta'n L, New York

AGENTS—Our New 16x20 "Negro Angel," Jack Johnson, and "Jesus Died for Both" pictures get the coin. Samples, either, prepaid 10c. Portraits 25c. Frames 14c. Pillowtops 25c. Catalog and samples Free. Berlin Art Association, Dept. 39 Chicago, Ill.

AGENTS Pillow Tops, Solar Prints, Bromides, latest finish in Portraits, Emerline. All styles of large portraits; finest work, lowest prices. Samples free. Crescent Portrait Studio, 919 Montana St., Chicago

AGENTS WANTED to sell trees and plants. Experience unnecessary. Steady work. Highest commissions, payable weekly. Clean, straight proposition. Free outfit. PERRY NURSERIES, ROCHESTER, N.Y.

TOBACCO FACTORY WANTS SALESMEN. Good Pay. Steady Work and Promotion. Experience unnecessary as we give Complete Instructions. Piedmont Tobacco Co., Bx. 814, Danville, Va.

AGENTS PORTRAITS 35c, FRAMES 15c. Sheet Pictures 1c, Stereoscopes 25c, Views 1c. Thirty Days' Credit. Samples and Catalog Free. CONSOLIDATED PORTRAIT, Dept. 4157, 1027 W. Adams St., CHICAGO

DON'T ACCEPT an agency until you get my samples and particulars. MONEY MAKERS. Address SAYMAN, 604 Sayman Building, St. Louis, Mo.

AGENT'S OUTFIT FREE—Delight, Biscuit, Cake and Doughnut Cutter, Apple Corer, and Strainer. 5 articles in one. Sells on sight. Large Catalog Free. Richardson Mfg. Co., Dept. 7, Bath, N. Y.

AGENTS $36 TO $76 A WEEK INCOME. New invention. Scrubs, takes up water. No wringing, no cloths. Sells everywhere—big profits—exclusive territory. Write today. Special terms. PIRRUNG MFG. CO., Dept. 43, Chicago, Ill.

AGENTS: A Live Wire; $800 a Week Easy. Sell the best Vacuum Cleaner on the market at price so ridiculously low that any one can afford them. Sells on sight. You be the one to get the thousands of dollars in profits. A postal will bring you full particulars. FREE full sized working sample. BRAHAM CO., C1051, CINCINNATI, OHIO

GREAT MONEY MAKER FOR AGENTS PROF. LONG'S MAGNETIC COMB Sell Magnetic Combs and get rich; agents wild with success. They remove dandruff, stop falling hair; RELIEVE HEADACHE, never break. Send 2c stamp for sample. PROF. LONG, 914 Ash St., PEKIN, ILL.

MEN WANTED in every locality in the United States to make $20 per week and $3 per day expenses advertising our goods, posting up show cards in all conspicuous places and generally representing us. Steady work to right men. No experience required. Write for particulars. Royal Remedy Co., London, Ont., Canada.

AGENTS The Light That Never Fails will produce better light than any other artificial lighting device. Special inducements and territory to right party. We want a good man in every city and village in the world. For full particulars address Dept. 10. NATIONAL STAMPING & ELECTRIC WORKS, 216-220 S. Jefferson Street, CHICAGO, ILL.

AGENTS 134% Profit Patented Safety Hold-Back New Agents' Proposition. Every owner of a vehicle buys. Saves time in hitching and unhitching. Insures safety in accidents—runaways—collisions. Just out. Thousands being sold. We absolutely control the sale of this wonderful seller. $3.50 to $7 a day profit. Write For Free Sample. L. THOMAS MFG. CO., 4117 Wayne St., Dayton, Ohio

MAKE MONEY EASY. Agents wanted in every county to sell the popular Novelty Knives, with name, address, photo, lodge emblem, etc., on handle. Send stamp for catalog. AGENTS EARN $75 to $300 A MONTH. (We show you how.) Big profits—quick sales—exclusive territory. Write quick for our liberal money making special offer to agents. Our new self-sharpening scissors are the quickest sellers for lady agents. NOVELTY CUTLERY CO., 23 BAR STREET., CANTON, O.

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Frank Doulton at Sea;

Or, Meeting Wild Adventures

By FRANK E. CHANNON

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Begun in No. 48, Oct. 1. Subscriptions can begin with that issue, or back copies can be obtained from news stands, or our agents, or by mail from office of publication.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE eight remaining men and Frank slowly crept forward. The magazines of their guns were filled, and each stood ready for anything that might occur. All the torches but Glass' were put out. The leader took his place in the center; the rest spread themselves out in a long line on either side, about an arm's length apart. Frank was on the extreme left.

Deeper and deeper descended the way; louder and louder roared the waters.

"Halt!" suddenly shouted the man on the right. The party stopped abruptly. They were standing on the brink of a mighty river. It dashed, roaring and foaming past them, splashing up against its rocky banks, and almost smothering them with its spray. Glass crept as near as he dared, and waved his torch high aloft. The further bank, if there was one, was invisible to them.

"Steady!" came the leader's command, as he made his way towards the left of the line, and placed himself at its end, then: "Follow me, boy!" he shouted, and they turned off at right angles and commenced to follow the course of this strange subterranean river. "Keep well together!" came the further order, and all closed up. Frank was now next to his leader. Suddenly, above the roaring of the waters a faint sound was heard. It was a shot!

"Halt!" cried Glass.

Again the faint sound of a gun boomed down to them.

"It's them!" shouted one of the men.

All listened intently. In the far distance a tiny spark of light was visible. It came nearer rapidly. Now it was being waved, and once more a shot broke the vast echoes of the cavern. Glass waved his torch in reply and fired his repeater. In another moment Jerry dashed up, breathless with fear and excitement. "We're shut in!" he cried, as he ran towards his uncle.

"Steady, steady!" came Glass' warning, as he caught the panting boy. "Now, what's happened? Tell us quickly."

"A man—some men—shot him—them—and shut us in!" the frightened lad panted incoherently. "Sam's dead, and Dick's run away! Come quickly!"

"Right about, boys," came the quick order, and again heading his men, Glass led them back in the direction they had just come, Jerry meanwhile trying to make his uncle understand what had happened.

"We were just standing around waiting, when some one shot and Sam fell. We rushed back toward the broken door—and—and it was up again—Sam was bleeding from his arm—he couldn't get up—I think he's dead——"

"Where are the others?"

"I don't know; they ran, too."

"Come along, lads, there's no time to lose!" shouted the captain, and the party went on at a sharp trot. They turned away from the river and climbed on up. Some rapid traveling brought them to where they had left the second detachment. Sam lay groaning on the ground. His companions were grouped around him; one was kneeling down bandaging his wounded arm.

"He's not dead!" shouted Jerry, delightedly.

Mr. Glass was at his side in an instant. "What happened?" he asked.

Explanations were quickly forthcoming. They had been attacked suddenly by unseen foes. The heavy steel door was in its place again; they were unable to get through. Of their comrades on the other side they knew nothing.

"This looks bad," was Mr. Glass' comment, as he examined the opening through which they had come. "It's fast sure enough."

"It can't be very secure," said Frank; "it was battered by our charge too badly; I can't see how they managed to even get it in position again."

"How many torches have we?" inquired Glass, turning around towards his companions.

"Three more besides the one that's going," one of the men answered.

"We must take care of those, or we'll be in the dark."

"Oh, that will not necessarily be so," contradicted a strange voice.

All turned about swiftly.

"The American!" cried Frank and Jerry in one voice.

"The same," replied the newcomer, bowing.

The rifle of every man in the cavern was pointed toward him.

"Put up your shooting irons, gentlemen," he order coolly. "Here, let us obtain a better view of each other; I scarcely had time to observe my visitors, so hurried was my exit on your last visit."

As he was speaking, he stepped toward the wall, and in an instant the cave was brilliantly illuminated. "Come, now that is better," he observed. "Mr. Glass, I believe," and he stepped briskly toward the leader.

"That's me, but I've got a few things to speak to you about before I shake. I don't know who you are, or what you are doing on our island, but I do know that you, or some of your fellows have shot and wounded one of my nephews, and you'll have to explain that before I shake."

"Ah, a most regrettable accident; I trust no serious damage is done—allow me to see the young man, but perhaps before we proceed further it might be well for me to mention that every man in your party is covered; if any of them make the slightest show of doing harm, I am afraid that other accidents may happen. I should regret that, of course; I merely mention it to avoid trouble."

While the American was speaking Frank eyed him closely. He was the same man who held them prisoner, undoubtedly, but his manner of speech was entirely different. Before he had seemed rough, almost uncouth; now he spoke as a gentleman. His every movement showed confidence.

"We shall attempt to do you no harm, unless you attack us," said Glass, shortly, "and as for your threat, we too carry our guns." He pointed to his own firearms.

"It's a truce then for the time being?" inquired the American.

"It is a truce," confirmed Glass.

"Let me see the young man," and he stepped briskly over to where Sam lay. "You would not have been shot if you had not made that sudden movement, my boy," he remarked, as he bent over the wounded lad. "My men thought you had seen them and were about to fire—oh, it's nothing very serious; merely a flesh wound; your nephew is all right," he said, addressing Glass. "And now, sir," he continued, "since you seem to be the leader, suppose you and I go in and have a pow-wow; kindly instruct your men to remain where they are until you return; I think it quite possible that we can arrange this matter without the shedding of further blood. Follow me!" and he pointed toward an inner apartment, which had remained hidden until the brilliant rays of the electric disclosed it. "Oh, you need have no fear of treachery—I give you the word of an American." He handed his rifle to Frank, as he spoke. "Keep this for me," he remarked. "You do the same, Mr. Glass," and giving his hands in his pockets, he turned his back on his visitors and led the way into the room, Glass following close at his heels. He closed the door as they entered.

"Now, sir," he said, turning swiftly on his guest, "it may interest you to know that you are in the presence of a representative of the Brazilian Government."

"And it may also interest you to know that you are in the presence of the Governor of the Island of Tristan d'Acunha," replied Glass, in no way taken aback.

"Pleased to make your acquaintance, Governor, and delighted to have you as my guest——"

"Your guest?" interrupted Glass, "it seems to me you are rather mine, since you are on my island."

"Pardon me, that is not correct," demurred the stranger.

"Why not?"

"Because we are under, rather than on the island."

"A quibble—the fact remains."

"When you know all I have to tell you and have seen all I have to show you, perhaps you may alter your opinion, sir."

"Suppose we come at once to the point," remarked Glass. "I understand that you claim to be an American citizen, yet you state that you are a representative of the Brazilian Government. How do you reconcile those two statements?"

"I am both. My name is Jackson; a typical American name, I am sure you will admit, yet I hold the post and draw the salary of 'Foreign Agent' of the Republic of Brazil; incidentally I may mention that that country is at present torn by the horrors of civil war, in your rather out-of-the-way island you may not perhaps be acquainted with that fact."

"It does not interest me," retorted Glass, "what I want to know is why you are on this island, sir; how you got here, and what secret lies in this mountain. I was unaware until last evening that it was hollowed to this extent. I want to remind you, sir, that this island is under the protection of the British flag and belongs to the British empire. Any acts of violence you commit here will have to be accounted for to His Majesty's Government."

The American laughed a scornful laugh. "The British navy, powerful though it is, has not yet learned the art of crawling beneath the earth's crust."

"No, but there are very few things her soldiers have not done," retorted Glass, warmly.

"Come, come," remonstrated the stranger, "we surely did not come here to discuss the feats, past or present, of the soldiers or sailors of England, and after all, it may be that I am doing your country a good turn and saving her a heavy bill by thus nipping in the bud the little plot which has been brewing around Tristan."

"Little plot!" echoed the islander.

"Little plot, I said," reiterated the American. "Surely you are not unaware that the landing of arms and supplying the same to rebels is contrary to international law?"

A light suddenly dawned upon Glass. "Oh, that's what your game is, is it," he said. "So you're after those cases. Well, they stay here."

"On the contrary they come with me."

"We shall never agree on that point, Yank. I see there's to be a fight, but before it begins, tell me one thing."

"Name it?"

"Where, in the name of Great Wellington, did you make your landing, and how long have you been fixing up these trimmings down here?"

"If I were to tell you, my friend, you would never believe me; it is best that you see for yourself. Suppose that we leave the matter of the ownership of those arms until a later date, and that you allow yourself to be conducted by me through my underground domains."

"I've been a smart way down this morning. How far does that hole run, stranger?"

"That 'hole,' as you call it, runs a greater distance than you have any idea, my friend."

The islander looked hard at the American. "It is not possible——" he began, but the other cut him short.

"Everything is possible!" he ejaculated. "Come, I think you trust me; bring along with you a couple of your men; send the rest to their homes, and perhaps by the time you return things may look different to you."

"It's a go!" said Glass, and the two men at once turned and went out.

"Men," the islander announced, when he appeared, "we are to bury the hatchet for a spell. Return to the beach and I will be with you all soon."

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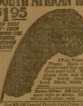

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American, but Frank, with Sam and Jerry went back with the rest to the village on the beach.

There was much excitement and speculation as to who the people of the cave could be, among the islanders. None knew that others besides themselves were on the island, and all were sure that it was impossible to land at any part except the beach. The older heads were dissatisfied with the action of Mr. Glass in going with the mysterious stranger, Mr. Jackson, as he had called himself, and one or two even went so far as to say he would never return alive. It was known that he had descended again to the interior of the mountain, though for what purpose, was not very plain.

No work was done that day, and late in the afternoon, Frank with Sam and his brother wandered out along to the further end of the beach. They discussed for the hundredth time the strange experiences through which they had just passed.

Suddenly Sam sprang up from the rock on which he was sitting.

"Look!" he shouted.

The lads all gazed in the direction in which he pointed.

Scarcely a mile from the shore a big steamer was visible. She was painted black from waterline to funnel-top, with the exception of a thin yellow band around the extreme top of her stack. A cloud of smoke trailed along behind her. A string of flags fluttered from her main-truck.

"The Black Crow!" cried Sam and Jerry in one voice. "Let's put out to her—oh, bother, you can't pull an oar, Sam, with your wounded arm; Frank and I will go

"Yes, let's pull out to her at once," said Frank, quietly, as an idea formed itself in his mind.

A few hundred yards farther on a small cobble was lying. The two boys jumped into her and Sam pushed her off. They waved their hands to the fast slowing vessel, and headed directly for her.

A few minutes' hard pulling and they were within hail.

Ahoy!" shouted Frank; "take us aboard!"

They ran the little boat up under the tall sides of the steamer; a rope ladder was flung over sides. Jerry made her fast and they clambered up.

A man in uniform stood on the deck.

"Well, what do you lads want?" he asked "Where's Mr. Glass? Why don't he answer my signals?"

"Sir," said Frank, "can I have a few words with you; I am from the Homer."

"Homer, eh? Why, cert, you're a young 'un, though."

In a few words the boy made the skipper aware of the turn of events on the island.

The officer whistled. "So, oh, that's the way things are running, eh? Where's these fellows' craft?"

"They have none, sir."

"Rot! they must have one; they didn't walk, did they?"

"I can't tell," said Frank, "but there's no ship here now."

"You say you have charge of these cases?"

"Yes, sir, and they had better be taken off at once before these men return; it is fortunate you returned so soon; the Homer only left yesterday, and Mr. Glass didn't look for you for some time."

The captain climbed on the bridge, and took the wheel.

"Things looking as queer as they do, I think I'll run in behind the bluff; we can handle the stuff as well there as from the beach; there's plenty of water and good anchorage."

He gave a bell and the vessel forged slowly forward. Two men were in the bows casting the lead. The Black Crow felt her way carefully. A boat put off from the beach as they passed, and headed for them. The flags on the steamer fluttered again and she continued on her way. In fifteen minutes she was lying snugly close up under the tall hills, well concealed from the beach. The small boat pulled directly for her. Three men boarded her and a conference was held.

It did not last long. Things began to hum on board the steamer. A heavy crane was swung out. A half dozen small boats crept out from the island, loaded to their utmost capacity, and the loading commenced.

"Now, boys, get a jump on you; I want to be under way again in two hours; grog's served around to all hands as soon as we're off," bellowed the big skipper, and the crew did get "a jump" on them.

"Got any kit, boy?" inquired the captain of Frank.

"It's aboard, sir," replied the lad, who had hastily brought his few belongings on the ship. He was busy now checking the cases of arms as they were lifted aboard.

Many an anxious glance was cast at the towering cliffs above, for at any moment the mysterious stranger and his men might put in an appearance. Steam was up on the Black Crow. The captain sprang to the bridge and gave a bell. The hull of the steamer shook; the engines commenced to throb, and then the blockade runner pushed her nose slowly through the water. She gathered headway fast; the throb, throb, changed to a furious pound, pound, and with every ounce of steam available she raced on.

"Guess we've given 'em the slip now grinned the skipper as he watched the receding island. "Mr. Jacobs, serve an extra dipper of grog with tonight's supper"

"Aye, aye, sir," came the reply, and the men set up a hearty cheer.

That night the captain of the Black Crow plied Frank with questions, endeavoring to find out who were the strange men on the island.

"I know nothing more about them, sir, except what I have already told you," replied the boy; they have some secret underground passage, which extends a long way out,, perhaps under the sea. It is well fitted up and lighted with electricity. Mr. Glass has gone down with their leader

"More fool he!" snapped the captain. "He should have waited and kept a sharp lookout for me."

"It was perhaps lucky he went, or you might never have got away," ventured Frank.

"I'd have made a smart try; I've a good supply of cartridges," retorted the captain, with a meaning look.

CHAPTER IX.

Two weeks later, after a splendid run, the Black Crow crept cautiously in toward the [illegible]lian coast. It was dusk, and a drizzling rain was falling. Far away to the west the lights of Porto Seguro twinkled like distant stars. Here and there a sweeping beam of light flashed across the sea. It [illegible] searchlights of the watching [illegible] warships, waiting for just such ships of adventure as the Black Crow.

On the blockade runner not a light showed, all was black as the night. Captain Hall on the bridge peered anxiously out through his night glasses.

"Keep her away, Jake," he muttered to the man in the wheelhouse, "we got to lay off for a time; those chaps seem uneasy just now; I'll make my run in the early morning."

Frank had climbed up beside the captain; he had become a prime favorite with him, and the two were chums.

"How is it, captain; are you going to make the dash now?" he inquired.

"Very soon, son—keep your weather eye open; you'll see."

About four bells, or what would have been four bells if there had been any sounding, of the morning watch, Frank did see.

The Black Crow had been slowly running back and forth, waiting and watching her chance. Suddenly the captain leaned back and shot a word of command into the wheelhouse. Word of command with the engine-room was by speaking tube only; no bells sounded. Instantly the steamer seemed to plunge forward. She gathered speed with amazing rapidity, and tearing through the water headed directly for a dark neck of land which loomed out before them. It looked as if the skipper was reaching to put her high and dry on the sandy headland. Frank, clutching the rail of the bridge with feverish anxiety, was momentarily expecting to feel the stout ship shiver under him as she ground her keel. Then in a second she spun around on her heel like a top, and was tearing off to starboard with ever increasing speed, with the shore so close to port that he could have tossed a biscuit on it.

Not a word did Arion Hall speak, and Frank knew better than to say anything to him. The vital, the critical moment of the expedition, had arrived. The mad dash was being made. The blockade runner, with her cargo of arms and ammunition for the Brazilian rebels, was seeking to gain the friendly shelter of the Porto Seguro harbor; she was running the gauntlet of the loyal fleet. Were they aware of her presence? Had they discovered her? Even as the boy debated the question in his mind, there flashed across the waters a blinding beam of light. The searchlight! It swept the sea forward and aft; it tarried for a brief second on the tossing waves to starboard, searching, searching like some giant reaching out for his prey. One moment the steamer was covered by the blackness of the night, the next it stood out revealed and brilliant in the glare of the searchlight, like some thief caught in the act of breaking in. The whole vessel was bathed in the searching white light; every object, every figure stood out boldly defined; in the next moment she had shot ahead again and was enveloped in the darkness. The great beam of light groped around blindly for a brief second, sweeping the sea fore and aft, then it settled upon its prey again, following her up with mulish persistency, refusing to again lose her, now it had once fastened upon her.

But a few seconds intervened, and then a hideous rattle burst forth, and out of the night sprang tiny flashes of fire, as the deadly three-pounders of the warships spoke their demand for the sneaking ship to heave to. The sea was alive with hissing shots, several crashed through the tall stack of the Black Crow. The splinters were flung in all directions, and the men instinctively ducked and clung to supports.

A sharp word down the tube and the ship sprang on with ever increasing speed Her hull shook and shivered like a thing of life; she groaned and creaked. Her funnel vomited dense volumes of black smoke, and now and then a fiery tongue of flame leaped from it. Close to them a hoarse rattle broke out, the rattle of the deadly machine guns. Not a sound came from the rushing ship, but the furious throb, throb, of her engines, not a word was uttered. Speed was their only hope.

Frank stood clutching to the rail as if spellbound. The action was intensely exciting; it was a race with death. Suddenly he sprang forward and grasped the skipper's arm.

"Look—there!" he shouted, and pointed over the rail to a dark form that was hissing through the water toward them.

"Hard aport!" roared the captain to the wheelhouse

The Crow swung around, careening over wildly, then shot ahead again with maddening velocity, while a long streak of foam and a hissing astern showed where the deadly torpedo had just missed her.

It was a close call. Ten feet more and her hull had been the target which the torpedo had found

"Good boy," muttered the skipper to Frank.

The words were scarcely out of his mouth when, with a hiss and a roar, a shell struck the pole mast behind them. It groaned staggered, then fell with a crash and a snapping of wire ropes and shrouds. The Crow almost stopped, shivered and shook herself, then sprang forward again, with the wreckage trailing along oversides.

"All hands clear away!" bellowed the skipper, and twenty men were at work ere the words had scarce left his mouth. Then the clang of ax and hatchet, the rending and tearing of rivet and bolt, the twanging of wire ropes, and the shouts of command rose above the din of battle. The Black Crow was fighting for her existence Another mile and she was safe. Could she make it?

With reduced speed, and trailing like a wounded duck, she fought her way on, while the shots and shells crashed and exploded around and in her. The shrieks of the wounded added to the awful din, and the furious pound, pound, of her engines vibrated throughout the ship, as she labored doggedly, savagely forward.

"We'll make it, lads, stick to it, the game's almost won!" roared the captain. The hiss of escaping steam and the roar of destruction sounded all around, but cool and collected the skipper handled his ship with a master-hand. The warships were behind now; they were entering a long and tortuous passage. With foremast gone, funnel a wreck, and hull hammered and wrecked about, the gallant Crow limped slowly into the sheltered harbor of Porto Seguro, where the crowds on the docks, who had been watching the midnight battle, surged forward to the waterfront and cheered and cheered again, while outside, the duped warships fired and fired in vain. The guns of the fort replied, but gradually the noise and hubbub ceased, and the wounded ship warped slowly into her berth and tied up.

"Phew, that was a close call! The [illegible] I've had yet, but we made it, eh, [illegible] and the indomitable captain slapped [illegible]ank heartily on the shoulders. "Your cases are safe now; we must fix up and get out again. That won't be half so bad; we have the heels of them all."

Frank drew a long breath and sank back exhausted, clutching at a rail for support. It was the most nerve-racking experience he had ever passed through.

"It's done you up, boy, eh?" said the skipper, smiling kindly; "you'll get used to those scraps after you've sailed with me [illegible]

Frank looked up. He noticed a little stream of red running down over the captain's face.

"You're wounded, sir'" he [illegible]ied.

"Nothing, nothing, just a splinter, but I've lost four of my boys"

"Dead?" cried the boy in horror

"Dead," echoed the captain; "it's the way of the sea, lad. Skinning in here is risky business, but it's the money as fetches us all to it. There's big money in it, and man will do most anything for the yellow-boys."

"I'll turn in, sir, if I may," said Frank, weakly.

"Turn in, lad, you'll feel better in the morning. You can sleep sound; we're all snug here, amongst friends; good night

"It's good morning, sir, see, the sun is rising."

"Right you are, boy, the night's past, and a warm night it's been"

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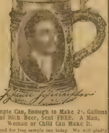

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The Captive Bandit.

(Continued from page seven.)

Kidd be blowed! I don't even know your name——

Rackley left his chair suddenly, took three soft, quick steps and tore the room door open. There, tightly pressed against the jamb, was Hop Soy, the Chinese cook. He had been acting the listener.

The possibilities of the case flashed upon Rackley. Confident that the fellow had never taken the role upon himself of his own initiative, it came to him that he had been bribed to spy upon them. Daniel Clarke had been roaring out rash words, and the secret was in hostile hands.

Rackley made a forward step, but the Chinaman was quicker than he. Small and alert, Hop Soy shot along the hall. The road-agent pursued, but he had to deal with a nimble and quick-witted enemy. A dozen feet away was a door which divided the hall into two parts. Hop Soy flashed through the door, slammed it to and turned the key just in time to stop the pursuer.

The latter was resolved to get the spy. He had a choice between bursting the door open and going down the front stairs. Taking the easiest way he bounded down to the lower hall. It was unlighted, but he saw a dusky form enter the room where he had left Burdilla and Jack.

As quickly as possible he flung the door open. Only his two friends were there.

"Where's the Chinaman?" he demanded imperiously.

"What?" demanded Jack, bewildered.

"Hoy Soy has played the listener and heard the truth from Mr. Clarke. Now he has fled. He must be run down or the whole business will go to the dogs. Here, Jack, help me! We must make a hurry search of it!"

"He will go to the kitchen!" exclaimed Burdilla. "This way!"

They went, but the cook's department was untenanted.

"He's gone to the loft," said Jack. "Either that or—"

"Listen!" commanded Rackley.

He bent his head for a moment, and then ran back to the front of the house. As he reached that point a horse dashed past, and on its back was a slight figure that clung monkey-like, but with a carriage not that of a white man.

"He's stolen an animal and started for Gideon Gap!" added Rackley incisively. "He was in Damon's pay, and he has gone to deliver his news. He's heard the truth! Quick—we've got to get horses, ourselves, and run him down. He must not reach the Gap."

Without a word Jack leaped through the open window. Rackley followed, and together they hurried to the corral. Asserting that they must have good animals, Jack picked quickly, they mounted with bridles in their hands, and so began the race. Passing the house Rackley called an encouraging word to Burdilla, and then the race was fully on. Adjusting the bridles as they went, the pursuers thundered along after the runaway.

The blackness of the dark night had already swallowed the Chinaman up, but the idea was so well grounded that he would ride straight to the town that they bothered little with that. Their work was to ride him down in a stern chase.

There was no definite road, but, for two miles, the ground was level and smooth, and excellent footing for a hard-ridden horse. Now, the pursuers called upon the [illegible]s and swept onward at top speed.

Rackley had no problems in his mind. He was positive that the cook had been bribed to listen, and that the briber was Sheriff Damon. That crafty individual was not spending all his time in night-sleeping nor day-dreams, and he had undermined the faith of one within the Clarke household. Hop Soy would make straight for Damon's quarters, lately changed from the hotel to a private house.

The task was to stop him before he gained the sheriff's presence. Unless that was done the bold game at the ranch was lost.

Before the second mile was half run the fact was developed that the road-agent had a better horse than Jack. It began to draw away, at first slowly, and then more rapidly. For a reason not clear to Jack, his mount seemed to tire prematurely.

The gain continued, and finally Rackley appeared alone in the night. Still urging his fine animal, he raced wildly toward the town, his eyes ever alert to catch sight of a small figure fleeing before him, but he pounded on and struck rising ground and still Hop Soy was an elusive phantom.

Gideon Gap was not an unfamiliar place to Rackley. He had often surveyed it from his mountain haunt, and several times he had ventured there at night. He knew where most of the towns-folk lived, and, best of all, where Damón's new headquarters were.

Presently the pursuer neared the first of the buildings, his steed running swiftly and gamely, but now breathing heavily. And still there was no Chinaman. Rackley grew uncertain. Had he misjudged the course of the spy? Had the cook deviated and gone elsewhere?

At almost the last moment he had his answer. Ahead of him was a slight rise of land that cut dark against the slightly lighter sky. And there, outlined against the upper stratum, was a galloping horse and a crouching little figure on its back.

Rackley bent and struck his own animal with the flat of his hand.

"We've just got to get him!" the road-agent declared. "Go, boy!"

Up the hill, and then the houses were before them, but something else was there. Another rider, the slight figure of the previous moment, and still the headlong flight.

Hop Soy was seeking his master's burrow.

But now he was in danger. Back of him, gaining at every stride, flew the pick of Clarke's corral, and the distance was eaten up with mighty bounds. Once, Rackley thought he could hear a low outcry from the cook, but he held to his way.

Suddenly he left his seat, with the horse still going, stumbled, fell, picked himself up and ran to a door. He began to pound upon it and utter discordant cries of terror.

Rackley drew rein, leaped to the ground, and hurried toward the same point. Hop Soy squealed louder than ever, shaking with fear.

Then, with the pursuer ten feet from the house, the door opened and a man stood facing the spy. The man was Sheriff Damon.

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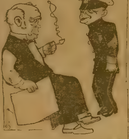

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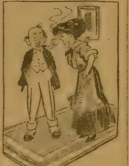

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The Withered Hand.

(Continued from page four.)

dow, for I have taken in the contour of the ground and paid attention to the foliage."

Habberton sprang to his feet.

"It's a signal for assistance!" he cried. "Thaddora calls for us, Jack."

"She is doing nothing of the kind," was the reply. "In a few moments you will see results. It is almost too dark to see her now. She is there, however, for I can yet make out her figure."

"Yes, yes."

The short twilight faded suddenly and night came on.

"Come," said Jack, rising. "We will discover what the signals mean."

Presently the spot occupied by the two friends became deserted and they approached the house from a point which still commanded a view of that particular window.

"Listen," said Jack in a whisper. "Here they come. Now you may understand Thaddora's signals."

From out of the shadows came six silent forms, walking each in the other's foottracks and all headed for the house.

"The six slaves of magic," said Habberton, as he grated his teeth and mechanically laid his hand on his weapon.

Jack nodded and with an uplifted finger cautioned silence.

The white-robed forms glided past them and disappeared among the shrubbery.

A half hooded light was seen for a moment in the window of the west wing and then slowly faded away.

"Some new devilment is on the tapis," Habberton exclaimed. "We have the whole band trapped!"

At that moment a bright light flashed up in the window and burned vividly for a second.

"Now or never!" exclaimed Habberton, seizing Jack's arm. "The blood of a tiger is in my veins. This night shall witness the last of Kalmah's chicanery!"

To Jack's astonishment he raced away and he saw him vanish among the trees.

"The moth goes to the fatal flame!" cried Clawson. "I'll save him if I can," and he plunged after the heir of The Larches.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE MAID'S STORY.

Habberton, in his eagerness to reach the house and confront not only Kalmah, but all his dark-skinned associates, seemed to spurn the ground beneath his feet.

He was soon at the house itself. To plunge headlong across the porch was the work of a moment and he was in the hallway panting to leap up the staircase and race down the upper corridor to the portals of the forbidden chamber where all the mystery lay.

He took no heed of his own safety; he seemed to forget the craftiness of the Hindus and the adventures of the past beneath that strange roof appeared to have vanished from his mind.

Not until he had placed one foot on the stair did he realize that he was alone. Jack had not followed him.

Then Habberton's senses seemed to return. He was once more tempting fate and what a fate, what a doom!

A hand seemed to draw him back, a voice to whisper in his ear:

"Beware! Go not up the stair. Death lurks among the shadows overhead. Kalmah is there."

He fell back and then heard Jack on the porch.

"Fool!" cried Clawson as he caught sight of Habberton. "Reason has halted you at last, eh?"

"I'm here at any rate," Habberton replied, biting his lips. "We can surprise them at their incantations."

"Perhaps," responded Jack coolly. "Time enough yet. Let us first look for old Drusilla. I want to know what she saw."

"Always the old servant! But have it your own way, Jack. She may be with Janus. You remember we are to bury him tomorrow?"

"Yes."

They went up the stairs together and turned toward the room of the little door where they had last seen the corpse of Janus.

Habberton opened the door cautiously.

A weird light from a waxen taper poorly illumined the scanty chamber, but it was sufficient to show them a smallish figure kneeling at the foot of a cot upon which lay a body shrouded with a white sheet.

"She's here," said Jack with a nod to Habberton.

He stepped forward as he spoke and gently touched Drusilla on the shoulder.

The old woman slowly turned her head and fixed her eyes upon the intruders.

Her sallow face had turned almost white. A shiver passed over her frame, but she did not rise.

Habberton shut the door and waited for Jack to proceed.

"We'll bury Janus tomorrow," he said in kindly tones to the mother. "We'll see that he is well buried——"

She tried to interrupt him with a word, but it died a-borning on her lips.

"Sit up, Drusilla," said Habberton. "I left you in my room. What did you see in the corridor?"

The old servant covered her eyes with her scrawny hands and groaned.

"You saw something?"

Drusilla did not reply, but nodded and groaned again.

Habberton was fast losing patience.

He lifted Drusilla from the floor and deposited her on a low chair.

"We must know for the safety of all of us," he said as he completed the action. "You must speak, mother."

"I would sooner keep silence, for you will not believe me."

"We will believe your every word."

"Nay, it was so terrible!"

"You saw Kalmah, then?"

"Nay, it was not Kalmah."

"Thaddora?"

Drusilla started at the name and again buried her face in her hands.

"It was not Kalmah nor Thaddora."

"Then, in the name of Heaven, who was it?"

The following second the old woman bounded from the chair and raced out of the chamber before a hand could stay her.

"Mad as a March hare," said Habberton.

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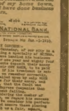

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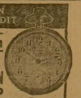

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"We always get nothing for our pains, Jack."

His words fell alone upon empty air, for Clawson had turned and bolted away. There was nothing to do but follow him, and in a thrice the chamber was tenanted only by the sheeted dead.

Habberton saw Jack running toward the head of the stair, then he saw him vanish, and when he reached the landing he was not to be seen.

Down the steps, two at a time, went the new heir and, seeing the library ablaze with light and the door open, he bounded inside to draw back just across the threshold.

Jack was there at the table and in the farthest corner of that strange room crouched a figure which he recognized as Drusilla.

"Bring her out of the corner!" almost shouted Habberton. "I'll tear her secret from her! I'll——"

Jack put out his hand and held him off.

"Wait," said he.

"It's always 'wait,'" cried Habberton. "I am tired of this inaction. I'll bring the old hag to her senses."

He cleared the space that separated him from the crouching figure and his hand was falling upon the half bared shoulder when a cry rang through the house.

"Heavens!" exclaimed Delos. "Whence came that cry?"

"It was on the stair."

Jack was out of the room in an instant and Habberton heard him on the steps.

"It's Marie," he heard him say in startling tones, and he bounded into the hall.

He reached the foot of the staircase in time to see Clawson descending with something human in his arms, and then he passed him with a ghastly face hanging over his arm.

It was Marie, the maid.

Clawson bore his inanimate burden to a settee and placed it thereon, then he turned upon Habberton with a quizzical expression on his face.

"The girl for the present," Habberton heard Jack say. "Let the old woman go."

It was not long before Marie opened her blue eyes and they filled with mingled wonder and awe as she centered them upon the two friends.

"Take me away!" moaned the girl as she shivered. "This is a house of terrors."

"What has happened?" asked Jack.

"I dare not tell. You would not believe."

She closed her eyes and shivered again.

"We will believe anything," said Jack. "Nothing is improbable at the Black Larches."

"It was this way," began Marie, taking a long breath. "I'll confess at the beginning that I have a woman's curiosity. I was in the corridor that terminates at the west. Across the floor began to creep a streak of light. It was not like other rays, for it twisted in and out like a serpent. All was silence. All at once I heard a hum of voices. It came from that room where Kalmah is supposed to live.

"I hugged the wall, for I was all a-shiver and my courage was fast leaving me. Suddenly the door opened and there was thrust out a hand that was dark and withered. It had nothing on the bones. The fingers seemed shriveled, the nails were like the claws of a giant bird. It was the most terrible hand I ever saw."

"What did it do?" asked the eager Habberton, remembering the hand he had seen take the book from the library.

"It remained motionless and then as suddenly vanished."

"Back in the room?"

"I cannot say," shuddered Marie. "It just disappeared, that was all."

"And then——"

"I was still hugging the wall," continued the girl. "Some unseen power seemed to hold me there. The light twisted again on the floor of the corridor. Once more the door opened and into the hall came the young woman whom old Drusilla calls Thaddora. She was clad in white, save that one arm was bare. She looked more beautiful than ever. There was a singular light in her eyes—a light that seemed to dart forward and burn its way along the corridor. But that was not all. It was the thing she wore on her naked arm."

Marie paused as if the narration was too much for her.

"What was on Thaddora's arm?" asked Jack.

"It was a living serpent. It was totally unlike the snakes I have seen at the zoo, a greenish thing with a strange head and terrible eyes. It darted out its tongue and Thaddora, looking at it, laughed, but not aloud. I was frightened into speechlessness. My very blood seemed to run cold through every vein. I did not move—I hardly thought—till Thaddora stirred and then slowly vanished. Now was my time, I thought. I bounded forward as if fear had given me wings, and ran. All at once the entire corridor swam in light. Whence it came I know not. My feet almost gave way beneath me. The old terror was coming back. I turned involuntarily. There, in the circle of that strange, weird light, stood—I know you will not believe me—I may have been mad—but there stood the old master!"

"My Uncle Tinus?" cried Habberton.

"It was his shape and his face," whispered the girl.

Habberton laughed.

"Surely you were mad," he said. "You saw the old master dead in this house?"

"Yes."

"You saw on his brow the Ace of Diamonds?"

"I saw that sign," was the reply. "But there he stood with the strange light about him."

At this moment there was a slight noise in the corner where old Drusilla was crouched and Jack and Habberton turned to see the old servant standing erect.

"It was the old master!" welled from her throat. "I saw him, too. I put out my hand to him and he vanished."

Jack and Delos looked into each other's face.

"Let me go!" cried Marie, starting toward the door. "Let me put behind me forever this house of mystery. I wish you well, Mr. Delos, but if I remain I will wear the sign of the Ace of Diamonds. They are now in the secret room—the dark-skinned men of India. I counted them as they came up through the garden—six in all. They are there with Kalmah and with Thaddora. And God pity me! the old master is with them."

Clawson had not the heart to stay the girl's progress. The arm which he had thrust out dropped at his side and in silence and with white face Marie, without looking back, passed from the room.

CHAPTER XV.

HABBERTON FINDS THADDORA.

"What do you think?"

The question fell from Jack's lips as Marie, the maid, passed out of sight, the sound of her footsteps dying away in the hall.

"The old master, my uncle alive?" cried Habberton with an incredulous laugh. "It is the veriest nonsense. But what say you, Jack?"

"I know what old Drusilla and Marie have declared. They both professed——"

"To have seen the old master? It is some of Kalmah's black magic. I will have no more of it."

"First of all, I think we should lay Janus away and then our hands will be free for the final struggle."

This task was accomplished without anything worthy of note. The grief of the chief mourner, old Drusilla, was deep, but well controlled. She was left at the grave in the grove and Jack and Habberton returned to the old house, but not without glancing up at the window in the west wing where they had seen the figure of Thaddora.

The strange girl possessed a fascination for Habberton. Why she had come to the Black Larches and who she really was had puzzled him from his first glimpse of her. How she had come into the mysterious game was another mystery as deep as that which overhung her real identity. He believed that old Drusilla knew much about her, but he had not yet questioned her and now he was deterred from doing so by the silent grief which shook her frame.

On the other hand Clawson had not given any account of his interview with Phineas Polly, the little thin-faced lawyer. If he had learned anything about Thaddora he was keeping it to himself. Habberton at times thought of abandoning The Larches to the doers of evil and darkness, but anon his gorge rose to think that beneath the roof which sheltered him and which he owned a wretch like Kalmah should operate.

It was the night after the scenes in the library with Drusilla and Marie that Habberton paused at the head of the stair and leaned toward the secret chamber in the west wing.

A strange, low sound had come from that direction. He had left Jack to himself in the library, the mystery-solver having said that he wished to consult some of the old tomes on the shelves, and he had retired to his own room for a little rest.

Habberton could not see clear to the end of the corridor that stretched before him. That the sound came from Kalmah's quarters he did not doubt, and whilst he listened all the ire of his nature rose once more against the crafty Hindu.

Suddenly he saw the very thing Marie had described—a light on the floor that twisted in and out like a serpent. It kept his gaze for some time and at last he glided forward, still watching it.

The sound he had heard was not repeated. A dead silence had followed. The light faded slowly away and the passage was again the abode of shadows.

Perplexed beyond measure Habberton halted. Should he go on and end his investigations at the very door of the secret room? Or should he seek Jack and, rousing him from his occupation, relate his experience? He was in a quandary.

"Why not do a little detective work myself?" he said at last. "I am here and Kalmah is yonder."

This decided him. He went forward.

The forbidden portal was not ten feet away when to Habberton's surprise it opened slowly.

He fell back and hugged the wall almost wishing that he had the power of forcing his body into it.

Into the passage stepped a figure, and the moment the gaze of the new heir fell upon it he uttered a little cry.

It was Thaddora!

Habberton's fingers itched to seize her, which he could have done by stepping forward, but he held aloof. He remembered what Marie had told him of her experience, how Thaddora had appeared on that very spot to her with a writhing serpent on her arm. But now she was dressed as he had seen her last, with the exception that upon her head she wore a sort of half turban, from beneath the folds of which fell her soft, beautiful hair.

She seemed to be revealed by a light that appeared to have sifted through the door itself, a mystifying light that puzzled Habberton, though upon second thought he would have charged it to some of Kalmah's dark magic.

She did not see him. Her luminous eyes seemed to look beyond him and down the corridor where the top of the staircase showed dimly.

"What will she do?" thought the silent Habberton. "Am I to lose her and thus lengthen out the mystery of this accursed house?"

All at once Thaddora moved, and he saw her approach him. Now escape was impossible.

She reached the spot directly in front of him and, unable to further control himself Habberton threw out one hand and the eager fingers closed on Thaddora's wrist.

There was a sudden start, but no cry. Thaddora simply turned and fastened her eyes upon him. Habberton did not release the wrist he had seized, and drawing the tall girl toward him, he looked into her face with all the intensity of his being.

He had caught her at last!

He was almost afraid to speak lest after all that which his hand clutched might not be flesh. He stood like one in a maze, looking into the staring eyes before him and wondering what would follow the dissolving of the tableau.

"Thaddora!" he exclaimed and started at the sound of his own voice. "You are Thaddora and you have just emerged from the forbidden room."

She did not reply. He felt a shiver run through the flesh his fingers clutched and her head was momentarily turned away.

"Are you not Thaddora?" Habberton asked.

Then, for the first time, a sign of real life—of sentient being, was seen in her face. A little smile came into existence at the corners of her matchlessly chiseled lips and her gaze fell upon him.

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This prescription comes from a physician who has made a special study of men and I am convinced it is the surest-acting combination for the cure of deficient manhood and vigor failure ever put together.

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"I am the second Vishnu," she said in low and mysterious tones.

"What? You? You are to me Thaddora!" cried Habberton.

"I am the Priestess of the Withered Hand," came again from the girl's tongue.

Habberton almost gasped. What dark necromancy was all this? She was the living, breathing embodiment of Thaddora and yet——"

Habberton found himself almost at his wits' end. He was fast losing belief in everything tangible.

"No! no!" he cried, coming to his own rescue. "You are not the Priestess of the Withered Hand. You are Thaddora, Drusilla's friend, my own guest."

The smile broadened for a moment and then vanished.

"And you?" she asked.

"I am Delos Habberton, heir to this house of darkness. Do you not recall the breakfast the first day you came? You cannot forget such things. Janus is dead. The sign of the Ace of Diamonds was on his brow. Drusilla herself fell into the hands of the Terror and wore the mark, but it left her."

She was listening to his every word and he was talking fast but emphatically.

"And you have waited for me here?" she said when he concluded.

"Yes!" cried Habberton. "For you, for I knew you would come. You have escaped from the snares of Kalmah. You have emancipated yourself. You——"

She tried to shake loose his grip, but failed.

Suddenly she made a motion with her head indicating the door of the secret room.

"I know," said Habberton. "He is yonder. The man from India is in the hidden room. Beyond that I know nothing now. But the time is coming when I shall know everything."

He spoke the last words through clenched teeth and his hand must have emphasized his language, for the tall beauty winced.

"You shall not go back," continued Habberton and forthwith he began to drag her toward the staircase. "Once free from the meshes of the Hindu net free forever!"

She did not resist now.

She was tractable in his hands and he almost laughed to himself as he led her down the corridor thinking how he would surprise Clawson in the library.

"My friend is downstairs," said Habberton in his glee. "You have met Jack. It was at the breakfast table. He will be delighted to see you."

She was smiling again, that stately smile which he had never forgotten and they went down the stairs together.

Habberton saw that the library was flooded with light. Not a single sound emanated from beyond the door.

"Ah!" he exclaimed as they reached the foot of the flight. "Here we are."

They faced into the room and entered.

"Heavens!" rang from Habberton's throat, and the next instant he had released Thaddora and bounded forward.

The figure of a man was lying on the tiger rug, his face upturned and his arms outstretched.

It was the figure of Jack Clawson.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE THRESHOLD OF FATE.

Habberton followed the first impulse that took possession of him.

He sprang back and locked the door lest Thaddora should give him the slip.

She showed no signs of doing so, but on the contrary came forward and bent tenderly over the man on the rug.

"He is not dead," Habberton heard her say. "You are not going to lose your friend, Mr. Habberton."

It was the first time she had mentioned his name and it sent a thrill through Habberton's frame.

"No, he is not dead," he replied, looking into Thaddora's face. "I have found the pulse. The heart beats but feebly, but that means life, you know."

She nodded and passed one of her pale hands over Jack's face.

Instinctively Habberton glanced toward the curtained niche where he had seen both the portrait of the old master and the Ace of Diamonds. He thought the folds moved slightly, but of this he was not sure and again went back to Jack.

After awhile Jack opened his eyes and looked wildly around. His gaze became centered upon Thaddora and after a long stare he turned toward Habberton for an explanation.

"I've found her," said Delos. "I have caught the elusive Thaddora. I have——"

"You see he has come back to life," interjected the girl, breaking in upon Habberton's explanation. "You can take care of him now."

She rose and threw a rapid glance toward the hall door.

"Don't let her go, Delos," said Jack in low tones. "To lose her now may be to deepen and prolong the mystery of the house."

Habberton sprang up and caught Thaddora, holding her back even though he knew the door was locked and escape impossible.

"You do not need me here," she cried, struggling slightly in his grasp.

"We need you—Jack says so," returned Habberton. "You must not return to the fakirs of India."

"But I belong to the Mystery. I am the Priestess of the Withered Hand."

Clawson gave her a quick look.

"The more reason that we should keep you here," he said. "You have passed the portals of the forbidden room. You know its secrets. You——"

"Would you imperil my life?"

"Not for the world; we would save you," cried Habberton.

"Then you must let me depart."

Her eyes were full of pleading, which it was hard to resist. Her face seemed to have increased in beauty within the last few seconds. She was more than ever a puzzle to the two friends.

All at once a whiteness came over Thaddora's face. Coming back from the door she dropped into a chair and looked up into the two faces that confronted her.

"What happened to you?" she asked, devoting suddenly her look to Jack. "Why were you on the tiger rug when we came?"

"It is a strange story," was the reply. "I was reading when the room suddenly swam in the darkness of Egypt and my throat was gripped by a hand that seemed fleshless. It was in vain that I struggled against such an assailant, unseen and uncanny. My senses deserted me and I knew nothing more till I looked into your faces."

"The room was ablaze with light when we came," said Habberton.

"The same power that held me in its grip must have relighted the chamber. Please pardon me, Delos, from another similar experience."

"It was a fleshless hand, you say?"

"My God! I felt the bones through the skin."

"It was—must have been—the same," Habberton responded. "It was the same hand that came through the wall and stole the book."

Thaddora said nothing. Leaning back in the chair she was looking across the room and her gaze seemed to settle upon the rows of mysterious volumes that filled the shelves.

Jack turned suddenly upon the girl. His first words seemed to call her back to life.

"The whole mystery of this house is in your hands, miss," he said. "The black arts that have cursed it ever since the day Kalmah set foot across its threshold are explainable through you. You have been in the hands of the wild, dark-faced heathen of India. You have even taken part in their rites"—he recalled Marie's story—"and you can throw light upon every dark spot."

"Yes," added Habberton. "We look to you for the truth, Thaddora." He loved to pronounce the name. "You are now forever free from the meshes of the net. We will stand between you and the subtle men of Buddha. Speak and we will yet this night break the power of Kalmah and dissolve in ruin the temple of darkness he has set up at The Black Larches."

"You cannot," came from the ashen lips of the beautiful occupant of the chair. "You do not know what you say. There is a door in this house beyond which lie the mingled mysteries of the centuries and beyond whose threshold lurks death—and what a death—for the fool who seeks to know."

"You cannot frighten us!" answered Habberton. "Were all the devotees of Kalmah's cult in that chamber we would enter. We have heard and seen strange things beneath this roof. We have gazed upon the sign of the Ace of Diamonds. It may be yonder at this moment where yonder curtain hangs."

Thaddora's gaze wandered to the hidden niche and rested there a brief spell.

"First it is my uncle's portrait and then the crimson sign," continued Habberton. "In yon corner one night I saw a dark, mummified hand pierce the solid wall as it were and filch a book of mysterious jargon from its place. Black art some would say."

The old smile came slowly back to Thaddora's face.

"The more reason, then, why you should not seek to know the mysteries of the Withered Hand and the secrets of The Black Larches," she said in deliberate tones.

"We intend to lay bare everything. What is the truth, Thaddora? You know."

"You forget," she said, one hand brushing back from her lofty brow a fugitive tress, "you forget what I am. I am no longer Thaddora. I am a priestess of the Withered Hand. It is beyond my power to lay bare the secrets of centuries."

"Then we will!" almost roared Habberton, blood leaping madly through every vein. "You need not assist, Thaddora. If we fail may the doom be ours."

She attempted to leave the chair, but the hands of Habberton gently yet firmly forced her back.

"It is for your own good, girl," he said. "The will of this dark-skinned snake must be broken and tonight."

He tore from the wall a cord which dangled there and bound Thaddora in the chair. She looked silently into his face during this proceeding and when he had tied the last knot and stepped back the corners of her lips gave birth to a strange, mysterious smile.

"Whom the gods would destroy they first make mad," she said in low tones. "The fate of the living is in your hands."

"Be it so. Come, Jack. To the portal of mystery and hellish rites!"

He looked once more at Thaddora, who was observing him with glances of pity and strode toward the door.

"I will listen to no arguments of waiting now," he continued, facing Clawson. "We storm the forbidden chamber and penetrate to its mysteries or perish!"

"Just as you please," smiled Jack Clawson. "I am with you, Delos," and, followed by the gaze of the fair captive of the chair, they rushed from the room and bounded up the staircase. In another moment they stood before the door of the secret apartment.

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At first her handkerchief she'd wave
To attract the young man tall,
And when encouragement he gave
She waved her parasol.

They are married now, in a back flat small,
And how the neighbors grin,
For instead of lace or a parasol
She waves a rolling-pin.

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Our cousin, by kinship allied.
Be kind to the camel; and, oh! never fail
To speak a soft word to the gnu.
Be kind to the lion—don't tread on his tail,
Or he may unkindly treat you.
Don't trip up the elephant, even in joke
Nor frighten the tapir from play.
And when you caress him, be sure you don't stroke
The rhinoceros' fur the wrong way.

PRATT'S CAT.

There was once an old gentleman named Peter Pratt, and he lived in a prim and precise white house that stood on a neat hill and commanded an extensive view of the railroad track.

The house was prim and precise, and Peter Pratt, perhaps from having lived in it for so long, was prim and precise too. He was an old bachelor, and so he lived all by himself, with no other companions than a tortoise-shell cat and a gingham umbrella. The umbrella was so old that no one in the village could remember when it had been new. Yet in spite of its age, Peter carried it about with him wherever he went and always held it over his head when he weeded the garden, which he did with a pair of sugar tongs, because, being so prim and precise, he did not wish to get his fingers muddy.

About the cat public opinion was divided. There were some in the village that remembered the time when she was quite a frisky young thing, and the oldest inhabitant even went so far as to say that he remembered the time when she was a kitten. But many people shook their heads at this and said it was no use for the oldest inhabitant to pretend he was as old as all that.

Whether she ever had been a kitten was a matter of doubt, but at least she had become a cat and was quite as precise and particular as Peter Pratt's house, his umbrella or Peter Pratt himself.

Now across the front of Peter Pratt's house there stretched an ample and commodious piazza, and on the piazza Peter was wont to sit with his cat on one side of him and his umbrella on the other and watch the trains as they puffed in and out of the little brick station at the foot of the hill.

In this manner Peter Pratt passed many hundreds of peaceful days. At length one morning as he was about to settle himself in his accustomed chair he found, to his amazement, that the cat was nowhere to be found. This was such an unusual occurrence that Peter Pratt was quite dazed and at a loss what to do. In vain he called. In vain he searched the house. The cat was nowhere to be found.

All day he hunted and all night, but without avail, and when morning came and still there was no cat, Peter Pratt came to a desperate resolve.

"It is the railroad," said he. "My cat has become fascinated by its speeding trains and has set out on her travels."

When Peter Pratt had reached this conclusion he came upon another almost immediately and that was that if the cat had gone he must go after her and bring her home.

It was a wrench for the good man to leave his home, but what would the home be without the cat? So he swept and dusted his spick and span house, washed his breakfast dishes and put them on the shelves, locked his front door and started down the hill as he heard the whistle of the approaching train. But halfway down the path he halted suddenly and gazed suspiciously at a bed of scarlet geraniums that grew at the side of the walk. Then he took out his spectacles and gazed attentively again. What he saw cause him to turn on his heel and hurry back to the house. It was nothing less than a large weed which grew right in the middle of the neat flower bed.

By the time Peter Pratt had returned from the house with his sugar tongs and had pulled up the offending weed the train was just drawing in at the station, and, though he hurried down the hill as fast as his dignity would permit, he arrived at the station only in time to see the train rapidly disappearing in the distance.

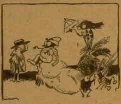
Sadly Peter Pratt climbed back up the hill to his lonely home. Not wishing to unlock his house again in the short time that was to elapse before the next train arrived, he wandered disconsolately into the ample orchard that stretched behind his dwelling. And as he walked he nearly stumbled over a small fox-terrier that lay crouched at the foot of one of the largest apple trees.

Peter Pratt took out his glasses, put them on and gazed mildly at the dog.

"Whatever are you doing here?" he asked.

As if in reply to the question the dog began leaping and barking and looking into the branches above him. What should Peter Pratt behold but his much-lamented cat. How Peter Pratt drove off the dog with his umbrella and carried his favorite back into the house needs no telling. It is difficult to say which of the two was the happier. And from that day on Peter Pratt continued to sit peacefully on his piazza with his cat and his umbrella watching the trains go by.

Environment.



Gus Garden—Doesn't Miss Lady Bug look natty?

Pete Potato Bug—Why shouldn't she? Isn't she engaged to Mr. Gnat.

QUEER.

Miss Agatha Dunn sat out in the sun
And faded her pretty pink gown.
Mamma scolded well, until the tears fell
In torrents that threatened to drown.
"You dress is a sight, I declare it is white,
But wear it you certainly must!
'Tis a poor recompense, that a child of your sense,
Is too much of a baby to trust."

Miss Agatha Dunn sat out in the sun,
In a gown that had one time been pink.
"If only I could bring it back—oh, I would!"
She cried, and proceeded to think.
Some raspberry ice, so cooling and nice,
In the freezer stood waiting for tea.
Said Miss Dunn: "Oh, I guess if I dip in my dress,
A beautiful pink it will be."

Miss Agatha Dunn rose out of the sun,
And slipped off the gown in a trice.
She rolled it up tight—there was no one in sight—
And she soaked it in raspberry ice.
It came out quite pink, but what do you think!
When the news of it reached mamma's ear
She scolded much more than she scolded before.
Now, don't you think mothers are queer?

Out of the Mouths of Babes.

Mamma—Bessie, why did you scratch your little brother's nose?

Bessie—'Cause his nose stuck out, an' his eyes didn't.

—

Little Elsie (at stamp-window)—My mamma wants 10 cents' worth of stamps.

Stamp Clerk—Of what denomination?

Little Elsie—Methodist, I guess. That is what all our folks are.

—

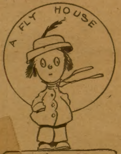
Small Elmer—Papa, what is that man cutting our trees for?

Papa—He is pruning them, my boy.

Small Elmer—Then how long will it be until the prunes are ripe?

NIGHTFALL.

Night flows softly over the land.
Dew drenches the grass.
Mist wraiths, hand in hand,
Dance eerily, brimming the hollows.
Flying low, two white owls pass.
Flying high, a water-fowl follows.
Cool night covers the land.



Said Tom - Now
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with Aeroplanes
and thing's —
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certainly in Style
it has so
many wings

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